

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1743.—VOL. LXVII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING SEPTEMBER 26, 1896.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



"DO YOU MEAN TO SAY THAT THE REPORTS CIRCULATED ABOUT YOU WERE UNTRUE?" SAID THE COMTESSE, CALMLY.

HER HEARTLESS MOTHER.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

THE London season had reached its meridian, and the Marchioness of Creamshire's spacious rooms—brilliant with light, and fragrant with flowers—were yet hardly large enough to contain all the guests that thronged them on the occasion of the grand ball that formed one of the principal features of the season.

It was indeed a scene of surpassing beauty and splendour for the eye to gaze upon; full of harmonious colouring, subtle perfume, and gentle motion, while a musical murmur of talk and laughter went on all around.

Only the *élite* of London society were represented at this ball, for the Marchioness prided herself on the exclusive nature of her list of acquaintances, and *nouveaux riches* could never succeed in crossing the charmed circle that she drew around it.

Ambassadors from China, Japan, Siam, and other distant lands were present, clad in picturesque array; rank and wealth rubbed shoulders with genius and learning, and some of the principal lions of the day, martial, musical, literary or dramatic, were to be met with as the night wore on, among the fashionable crowd.

Dan Godfrey's band was discoursing its sweetest strains when a young officer, who had arrived rather late, stood impatiently aside, watching the dancers as they whirled past him.

He had failed to obtain a partner for the waltz just commenced.

"All his comrades, watching said,
"He must dance, or he will die,"

laughingly quoted a brother officer, who formed one of a little group of military men standing in the doorway. "Teddy, old fellow, here comes the Marchioness. Ask her to have pity on you, and introduce you to that pretty girl in the corner yonder. Rescue her like a gallant knight from the clutches of the deaf old dowager who is boring her at the present moment."

The Marchioness, a tall, stately woman, with

abundant snow-white hair, gleaming dark eyes and a pleasant smile, willingly granted the young guardaman's request, and he was soon gliding round the room with the pretty girl in question for his partner.

"But my dear Violet, you are not going to belie your name and become a wall-flower on the occasion of your first ball, such an important affair to most young girls," remarked the Marchioness to a lovely *débutante* who sat by her mother's side, half frightened, wholly delighted, regarding the gay scene before her with eager, wistful eyes.

"I do not wish her to dance too often," replied Lady Montagu, a pale-faced, aristocratic matron, with frosty blue eyes, and thin, firmly-closed lips. "The way in which some girls romp through all the dances is simply disgraceful. Violet has already been asked several times, and I think she can very well sit out the remainder."

"You must not be too hard upon my little girl," said the Marchioness with a smile. Lady Montagu, who belonged to a poor, though sorely impoverished family, was an old friend of hers, and Violet was her god-child. "This

is her first ball, remember. Let her enjoy it as much as possible. She will learn only too soon to regard such things from our own faded standpoint, when she has been to many others. Kenneth Graham, the young barrister whose name is on everyone's lips in connection with the Townshend case, is coming towards us, evidently in search of a partner. Shall I introduce him?"

"By all means," replied Lady Montagu, graciously.

If she did not wish her daughter to waste time and run into danger by dancing with ineligible young men she had every desire to encourage the attentions of those on whom Fortune had freely lavished her gifts, and Kenneth Graham might fairly be regarded as a favourite child of the fickle goddess.

By means of a profound vigorous intellect, severe application and dogged perseverance, he had gradually emerged from his original obscurity as a briefless young barrister into the broad daylight of success, and a firmly established legal reputation.

Then he had retained for the defence in one of those "sensation" cases that not unfrequently occur in high life.

His masterly elocution, close, powerful argument, and clever application of legal tactics, had gained the day for his client, and increased his own celebrity at the same time.

Briefs poured in upon him rapidly; his society was eagerly competed for even in the most exclusive circles, and he received more invitations throughout the season than he had either the time or the inclination to accept.

He could hardly be called rich, since he had no income beyond that which he derived from his profession. But only one life, that of an old and feeble man, existed between Kenneth Graham and a peerage.

This fact was well known to all Belgravian mothers, and Lady Montagu smiled sweetly upon the young man as he wrote his name on Violet's tablet against the next set of laurels, after being introduced.

Might not her daughter succeed in winning the matrimonial prize for which others had angled in vain?

She hoped devoutly that such might prove to be the case, for her income was but a small one, and her cold, calculating nature led her to regard her only child very much in the light of so much capital to be well invested for their mutual interest.

Happily unconscious of her mother's mercenary designs, Violet took her place among the other dancers with her tall partner.

She had felt nervous and sorely embarrassed for something to say when dancing with other men, but there was a blending of strength and tenderness in the young barrister's manner that tended to restore her self-confidence.

After a few remarks had passed between them she even ventured to look up at him for the purpose of getting a better idea as to the personal appearance of the legal celebrity of whom she had heard so much.

He was not handsome, she told herself, quickly, but without any sense of disappointment. He had a broad, white forehead, from which the fair hair was flung carelessly back in defiance of the close-cropped fashion of the day; deep-set, lustrous grey eyes; irregular features; a large, well-shaped mouth, and a splendid set of teeth that showed to advantage whenever their owner indulged in a hearty laugh. What his face lacked in conventional good looks, it more than atoned for in manliness and force of expression. Kenneth Graham was a favourite, both with men and women, for law, in his case, had been grafted on to a frank, genial, irresistible nature, which never failed to gain friends for him among all classes of society.

"Are you fond of dancing?" he inquired, noting the expression of quiet delight on Violet's face, as they floated along to the dreamy, entrancing strains of the splendid band.

"Yes, very!" she replied, softly. "This is my first ball, and you cannot think how new and delightful it all seems to me. Why I only came home from the convent-school, near Brussels, a

month ago, and now I am in the very heart of the great fashionable world. It might be fairy-land; the lights, and the music, and the dresses are so lovely."

Kenneth Graham smiled on hearing this naïve confession.

"I am almost inclined to envy you the freshness of feeling that makes a ball seem such a delightful and important event," he remarked. "The bloom so soon gets rubbed off enjoyment of this kind, and yet it is only right and fair that a *débutante* should view everything through a rose-coloured medium."

"I thought perhaps I should be left altogether without partners," she continued in shy merriment. "Would not that have been a dreadful fate? But I have had several already, and I might have had more, only mamma wished me not to dance too often."

"Pray, what put such an unreasonable idea into your mind?" inquired Kenneth Graham, with growing interest and amusement.

"Well, as a rule, gentlemen don't care to dance with mere school-girls, do they?" she replied, gravely.

Most big men have an instinctive liking for little women, and Violet's *petite* loveliness served to enhance the feeling of admiration she had already awakened in Kenneth Graham's breast.

Only a fairy-like girl, with small piquant features, rose-leaf complexion, great dark eyes of violet hue looking shyly out from under their heavy white lids, and a quantity of soft brown hair drawn high up, until it formed a coronet on top of the dainty head. Only a fairy-like girl, and yet how often during the days yet to come would the haunting memory of those charms recur to Kenneth Graham like a strain of familiar music, full of mingled sweetness and sorrow.

He took her back to her mother when the dance was over, and remained beside them until Lady Montagu declared that it was really time for them to be going.

When the shawling and cloakng process was over, the young barrister reserved to himself the privilege of putting them into their carriage; and Lady Montagu nestled back among the cushions with an air of extreme satisfaction.

"Have you enjoyed your ball, Violet?" she inquired, sleepily.

"Oh, so much, mamma!" said Violet, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes; "and of all my partners I think Mr. Graham was the nicest by a long way!"

"A candid confession," replied her ladyship. "You must be a little more reserved when commenting upon other people, my dear. At the same time, Mr. Graham is a very estimable young man."

Kenneth Graham found time to call upon Lady Montagu and her daughter the next morning, and that anxious parent was not slow to observe how frequently he contrived to meet them in society, while on such occasions his attentions were to a great extent concentrated upon Violet.

An old campaigner, she was well acquainted with all the symptoms that lead up to a proposal, and already she began to plume herself upon the probable acquisition of a desirable son-in-law, who would not only take Violet off her hands, but consent to pay some of these tormenting tradespeople into the bargain.

Her ladyship's surmise, to the effect that Kenneth Graham had fallen in love with Violet, was perfectly correct.

The girlish loveliness and simplicity of the *débutante*, the quiet, graceful originality that characterized her every word and look, had fairly taken the practiced matter-of-fact barrister by storm.

Love gained a decisive victory over law; and frequent intercourse with the object of his affection only confirmed him in his desire to win her for his own, and to place himself and all his prospects at her disposal without delay.

And his honest, manly love was not unreciprocated. It would have delighted him could he but have known what a prominent place he occupied in Violet's thoughts, and how dreary

a ball or a dinner-party seemed to her when he was not present.

Day by day she was all unconsciously realizing the beauty and value of life to a yet fuller extent, as the sun of love rose higher in the sky, enveloping all things of earth in its soft, tremulous golden haze.

She was arranging flowers in the bright little morning-room after breakfast when Kenneth Graham, an early visitor, was announced.

A sudden thrill swept over the girl's slender form as the object of her day-dreams came and stood by her side.

"They are very lovely," he remarked presently, as he twisted a fragrant narcissus round and round between his fingers; "and how artistically you have arranged them, giving due effect to perfume and colour!"

"Will you have one?" she said, offering him a magnificent carnation; but to her surprise he made no attempt to take it.

"I want a flower, it is true," he continued, in a tone of subdued earnestness; "but it must be of my own choosing."

"What is the name of your favourite flower, since you are so particular?" she inquired, with downcast eyes.

"Violet," he replied, boldly; "and if you cannot give me that I will have no other. Darling, have I made my meaning sufficiently plain?"

He must have succeeded in doing so, for although her answer was somewhat inarticulate, a very happy young couple presented themselves before Lady Montagu later on to gain her consent to their engagement.

She gave it with graceful reluctance and some comment upon Violet's youthfulness, but in her heart she rejoiced over the success that had attended her matrimonial scheme.

Now commenced the happiest part of Violet's existence. She stood upon life's threshold, gazing down a long vista formed of countless delights yet to be realized, but enjoyed already in anticipation, while the knowledge of Kenneth Graham's love throbbled through all else, imparting a tender gladness of its own to other joys that rendered them doubly dear.

Lady Montagu went to Cannes at the end of the London season, and Kenneth joined his fiancée and her mother there for the brief space of time he could steal from his almost endless legal work.

Violet, who feared that he was overtaxing his strength, felt thankful when in November they returned to town, and her lover was once more within easy distance.

"Well, pet, have you had a good time?" he inquired on the day after their arrival, as he stood by one of the drawing-room windows with Violet, while Lady Montagu conveniently disappeared from sight in the depths of an easy chair.

"Yes, very," she replied, gently; "but I am glad to be at home again, with you close at hand, Kenneth. Perhaps I am very foolish but I have such a dread lest something should occur to separate us even now, lest our happiness, too, should be complete, too vivid to last!"

"You foolish child," said Kenneth, reassuringly. "Who or what could possibly come between us now?"

But ere Violet could frame any reply Lady Montagu's footman threw open the door and announced the Comte de Beauville.

CHAPTER II.

KENNETH GRAHAM, on looking up somewhat impatiently as the above announcement was made, beheld a middle-aged man of medium height, with a colourless, handsome face, dark hair and eyes, and a small, carefully trimmed beard and moustache.

But for a certain worn *blasé* expression, and a liberal allowance of crow's-feet, the Comte de Beauville might have entered the lists as a formidable rival against much younger men and come off victor. As it was, the easy, graceful bearing

and the calm almost unconscious assurance born of long and varied experience that distinguished him were vastly in his favour, and helped to remove any sinister impressions that his passion-worn face and softly-spoken innuendoes and caustic remarks had produced upon others. A wealthy bachelor, belonging to an old French family, and the owner of several large estates in the South of France, the Comte was always well received in the best society that London and Paris could afford.

His extravagant tastes and wild deeds had made a name for him throughout Europe, and yet the world had not banished him from its good graces. For thus far he had contrived to avoid committing any of the sharply defined and glaring faults that it feels reluctantly called upon to condemn, even in its most favoured children.

Lady Montagu had frequently met the Comte de Beauville in society both at home and abroad during Violet's schooldays, and it was with a feeling of pleasure and maternal satisfaction that she introduced him to her daughter, and noted the look of repressed, but genuine admiration that passed over his face as he greeted Violet with a blending of courteous familiarity and well-feigned astonishment.

"Is it possible, my dear Lady Montagu," he exclaimed, gently, "that the little one at whose shrine I once offered incense in the shape of toys and bon-bons has developed into such a charming demoiselle? It is such a long while ago that I fear she has forgotten all about her first admirer," he continued, with a smile.

"I can just remember you, Monsieur le Comte," said Violet, rather coldly.

His conciliatory manner had for once failed to produce a good impression; and the young girl already entertained an instinctive aversion towards this nervous, supple, perfectly dressed Frenchman.

"How kind, how generous of you to carry the image of one so unworthy in your heart until now," he replied, gracefully, while Kenneth Graham stood by with a very perceptible frown on his fair English face. To the young barrister, with his high principles and fine sense of honour, a fashionable row like the Comte de Beauville was a very contemptible person indeed. It annoyed him beyond measure to think that such a being was permitted by the usages of society to approach his Violet—the pure, sweet, flower of womanhood that was from henceforth to bloom for him alone.

In Kenneth's opinion that gallic weed, the Comte, was guilty of sacrilege in venturing to breathe the same air with Lady Montagu's daughter.

"You must not address too many pretty speeches to Violet," remarked Lady Montagu, smilingly. "Or Mr. Graham may object. This is her first season, and she is already a *fiancée*. My one ewe lamb has been appropriated, you see, while some mothers, who can boast of a whole flock, are left in undisturbed possession of their treasures."

"Mr. Graham is deeply to be envied," said the Comte, regarding the young barrister as he spoke, with a comprehensive glance of newly-awakened interest. "At the same time I can but admire the promptitude he has displayed in securing so fair a prize without any loss of time. Doubtless he was aware that many other suitors would find there was no time to be lost."

"Exactly," replied Kenneth; "and some of them might, on inspection, have turned out to be wolves in disguise."

"You will dine with us to-night, Comte?" said Lady Montagu, anxious to turn the conversation into a more desirable channel. There was evidently a screw loose somewhere; and the two men were not getting on at all well together.

"I shall be delighted to accept your invitation," replied the Comte, who had suddenly determined to spend as much time as possible in Violet's society. If only for the malicious pleasure of annoying Kenneth Graham, whose prejudice against

himself he had not failed to remark. "I only arrived in town this morning, and I am perfectly willing to devote as much of my time to your ladyship as you may care to claim."

"Mind that we do not cause you to regret the rash offer just made before the season is over," said Lady Montagu. "Mr. Graham's legal engagements frequently take him away from us, and when that is the case, and we require an escort, I shall call upon you to fulfil your promise."

"I shall be happy to take Mr. Graham's place with you at any and all times," he replied, in a tone that exasperated Kenneth to the last verge of endurance, although there was nothing in either the words or the manner of uttering them that he could take open offence at.

"You, of course, will dine with us, Kenneth?" remarked Lady Montagu, sweetly.

"I am afraid I shall not be able to do so to-night," he rejoined, as he took leave of Violet, and bestowed a very slight bow upon the Comte de Beauville; "but I shall meet you at the opera later on, and after that there will be the D'Arcys ball."

"Dear fellow, he works so hard!" said Lady Montagu, sympathetically, as the door closed behind Kenneth, much to Violet's regret and the Comte's satisfaction. He had the coast all to himself now, and he was not likely to allow such a good opportunity for supplanting another man in the affections of a lovely woman to slip through his fingers.

Without any apparent effort he laid himself out to please both mother and daughter. Choice morsels of scandal, racy anecdotes, piquant and very personal stories concerning well known men and women, clever caustic character sketches flowed from his lips for the benefit of Lady Montagu, who listened and laughed even while she scolded him for uttering them. To Violet, however, he spoke chiefly of books, pictures, music and foreign travels, drawing her out as to her own tastes, and inserting here and there a delicately-worded compliment.

But although he made her feel interest in spite of herself, Violet could not overcome her previously formed dislike to the Comte de Beauville. She was thankful when his visit came to an end; and dinner that night seemed, to her, a tedious affair since Kenneth was not present. The Frenchman's brilliant conversation could not reconcile her to her lover's absence, or cause her to forget it for the space of one moment.

Kenneth joined them at the opera, according to promise; but even there in some inscrutable manner, and without any absolute breach of courtesy, the Comte contrived to monopolize Violet's attention, and to prevent the lovers from indulging in the pleasant uninterrupted talk of two, so dear to all engaged people.

"I've hardly been able to say a word to you all night, thanks to that French fellow," growled Kenneth, as they made their way out with the Comte de Beauville and Lady Montagu ahead. "He might confine his attention to your mother, Violet. It's bad form on his part to monopolize you so completely, especially when I am present. If it goes on I shall speak to Lady Montagu about it. A ramp like De Beauville ought not to be admitted to the same degree of familiarity as a family friend."

Much to Kenneth Graham's disgust, however, the Comte became a daily visitor in Park-lane. Lady Montagu met his remonstrances with a few words of vague excuse and explanation. The Comte de Beauville was really an old friend of hers. He had sown his wild oats, and was about to settle down as a respectable member of society. She could not find it in her heart to cut him, or even to discourage his frequent visits.

Lady Montagu would hardly have seen so much of her old friend had it not been for Violet, who was, in fact, the magnet that served to draw him so often in the direction of Park-lane.

His cold heart, fastidious self-centred tastes and cultured intellect had thus far enabled him to float easily and pleasantly over the sea of life, indulging in every enjoyment without coming in contact with any dangerous rocks in the shape of

deep, lasting attachment, or passionate, absorbing love calculated to shake the severe cynical philosophy upon which he secretly prided himself to its centre; and prove to him that, like other men, he was but human.

With every form and degree of flirtation, however, he was thoroughly acquainted. These mere skirmishes with love's outposts, so far as he himself was concerned, did not go far below the surface or produce any serious result. For the possible effect upon the woman's heart he cared but little; it was such an easy matter to throw the toy aside when once he had broken it and look round for another.

Why this man, who had so long scoffed at love, and who had been in the habit of meeting many of the fairest and most brilliant women society could boast of for years past without succumbing to their charms, should suddenly have fallen violently in love with a shy, gentle unassuming girl, fresh from school, and who had never given him the least encouragement, is a metaphysical mystery that must perforce remain unsolved. There was at least some poetical justice in the fact of his choice having fallen upon one who cared less than nothing for him; and who was, moreover, the promised wife of another man. Hard and pitiless himself, he had yet to learn the pain and humiliation of being compelled to sue in vain for the treasure he most desired to possess.

In his heart of hearts the Comte de Beauville had determined that Violet should one day become his wife.

If her engagement to Kenneth Graham was a serious stumbling block in his path it yet served to impart a peculiar zest to the affair.

To him it would be a daring, as well as a delightful thing to usurp the young barrister's place as Violet's acknowledged lover, and to effect a successful raid upon another man's preserves.

He had read Lady Montagu aright, and he felt certain that she would not scruple to sell her daughter to the highest bidder; about Violet's sentiments, though, he was much less confident.

"I wish that I had come upon the scene a little sooner, or else that I had stayed away altogether!" he remarked to Lady Montagu one day, when Violet was not present. "Your daughter's premature engagement to that decidedly uninteresting barrister, Kenneth Graham, has deprived me of the pleasure I should have experienced in becoming your son-in-law, Lady Montagu, had circumstances been differently arranged!"

Her ladyship regarded him, as he spoke, with a glance of profound astonishment.

"What a strange speech for a confirmed bachelor to make!" she replied, anxious to arrive at his real meaning. "Did you not tell me once that married life had no charms for you?"

"No sensible person ever forms an opinion or airs a theory believing it will last them without any change or modification to the end!" was the ready retort. "Fresh events are constantly compelling us to adapt our ideas to their requirements. My prejudice against matrimony vanished from the hour when I first became acquainted with the lovely girl whom I cannot have the glad privilege of wooing, since—unfortunately for my peace of mind—she is already appropriated. I would willingly give the half of all that I am worth could I but stand in Kenneth Graham's place!"

For once in his life the Comte de Beauville was thoroughly in earnest. Lady Montagu perceived this, and a feeling of intense regret and petulant self-reproach darted through her mind in consequence.

Here was a man, ready to place both his title and estate at her daughter's feet, and she had allowed the girl to engage herself to a mere barrister, who might have to wait years before getting either.

It was really too provoking; for although the engagement had appeared to be a very desirable one at the time, the Comte de Beauville's confession had thrown it entirely in the shade.

Lady Montagu told herself that she had been very foolish in accepting the first fairly good offer

for Violet; and yet, much as she longed to break off the now unsatisfactory engagement, no valid excuse for such a proceeding suggested itself to her fertile imagination.

But what she could not accomplish for herself subsequent events kindly accomplished for her. Glancing down the *Morning Post* a few weeks later on, in a state of extreme low spirits owing to her heavy debts, an important announcement met her eye, an announcement that had to be read twice over before she could fully realise its meaning.

"Violet, what do you think?" she said, quickly. "Lord Fossilton, Kenneth Graham's great-uncle, has just married one of the Montmorency girls! He must be in his dotage; such a ridiculous disparity, too, in point of age! In all probability, there will be a son-and-heir, and Kenneth will not succeed to the title and estate after all!"

"Poor Kenneth, what a shame!" replied Violet, indignantly; "but it will not affect him so much, since his profession secures for him a good income, and renders him quite independent of Lord Fossilton!"

"You are a foolish child!" said her ladyship, sharply, "and you know nothing about money matters. His marriage will make a great difference in Kenneth's prospects, and it may very likely affect your engagement, Violet. I cannot allow you to marry a man who has only his professional income to depend upon!"

"Mamma! how can you say such a thing!" demanded Violet, breathlessly. "I love Kenneth for himself, not for anything that he may or may not possess. I will never consent to give him up."

As she spoke the drawing-room door opened quietly, and Kenneth entered unannounced. He glanced swiftly from Lady Montagu to her daughter, and drew his own deductions from their troubled faces.

"I am glad that you are here, Mr. Graham!" said Lady Montagu, coldly. "I wish to speak to you in private. Violet, dear child, will you go down to the dining-room! Madame Leman wishes to ask you some questions about your new ball dresses."

"No, I will not go!" Violet replied, earnestly. "I must hear what you are about to say to Kenneth, mamma, since it concerns me so closely."

"You are a wilful girl," said Lady Montagu, "but it will make little difference whether you go or stay. I only wished to save you from unnecessary pain. Mr. Graham!" she continued, "are you aware that your great-uncle, Lord Fossilton, was married yesterday?"

"He acquainted me with that important fact only this morning by means of a telegram," said Kenneth Graham, quietly.

"His marriage must needs affect your prospects to a serious extent!" she continued. "And under the circumstances, much as they are to be deplored, I cannot allow Violet to become your wife! As a man of honour you will doubtless consent at once to release her from her engagement, since your position has just undergone such a radical change for the worse."

"Violet, does this request emanate in the first instance from you?" he inquired gravely, and sadly, as her eyes met his, like clear wells of sunny light, within whose liquid depths truth ever lurked. "Am I to understand that you wish our engagement and all connected with it to come to an end?"

"No, a thousand times no!" she replied with a great sob. "I will never give you up, Kenneth, of my own free will. I hold you to your promise as much now as ever. I am not an automaton," she continued, firmly, "to be disposed of without any regard to my own wishes in the matter. I accepted you with mamma's full consent as my future husband; but I cannot renounce you at her bidding."

"Lady Montagu, you hear this?" said Kenneth, as a look of intense relief and gladness passed over his stern, young face. "Violet is true to me, and I refuse to accept my dismissal from anyone else. I hardly know why you should withdraw your favour from me

simply because I am not very likely to inherit the Fossilton property now, owing to my uncle's marriage. My income, like my reputation in legal circles, is steadily on the increase. Some day I may even gain a title, and in that case it will be the fruit of my own endeavours, no worthless thing inherited from a defunct relative."

"I have nothing more to say upon the subject!" remarked Lady Montagu, icily, "unless it is that I am surprised at your unwillingness to grant my request. Violet being only a minor I might, if I thought proper to do so, exert my authority and put an end to the engagement at once, only I am reluctant to adopt any extreme measures. You take advantage of my generosity!"

"I fail to perceive it!" said Kenneth, dryly. "The Comte de Beauville may, however, be much better acquainted with it. Your ladyship has always regarded him with favour."

Then, ere the guilty flush that his words had called up to Lady Montagu's pale cheek had subsided, Kenneth Graham left the house in a frame of mind to quarrel with the whole world, and let it come on if it dared. Then the tamony of Violet's brave, loving words and staunch fidelity came to his aid, and he told himself that with such a treasure still remaining to him all minor evils might safely be tidied over and vanquished in the end.

CHAPTER III.

INDIRECTLY, old Lord Fossilton had inflicted a grievous injury upon Violet Montagu, when he thought proper to marry a woman young enough to be his own daughter.

But for this marriage, Kenneth Graham would still have been heir-presumptive to the title and estates, with every prospect of speedy inheritance, while Lady Montagu would not have withdrawn her consent from the engagement existing between her daughter and the young barrister.

As it was, Kenneth Graham steadily refused to accept his dismissal from any lips save Violet's own.

He still went to Lady Montagu's house occasionally, to see his *fiancée*, although, to his proud spirit, the idea of entering a house where all the inmates save one regarded him in the light of an unwelcome intruder, was hateful in the extreme.

For Violet's sake, however, he continued his visits, in spite of all discouragement offered him by Lady Montagu.

The dogged pertinacious *déjà-dit* side of his character was aroused to its fullest extent by the unfair opposition, and quiet, but systematic persecution to which they were both subjected.

Lady Montagu longed to close her doors altogether against Kenneth Graham, since her matrimonial projects for Violet had undergone a radical change.

But he was too well known, too important a member of society, for such an extreme course of action to be adopted towards him without causing an unpleasant *escalade*, and an unpleasant amount of gossip and wonderment in polite circles.

He had not misbehaved himself in any way, and she could hardly account for the sudden breaking off of the engagement by disclosing her true motive for such an unjust proceeding, viz. the arrival upon the scene of a far wealthier lover, and the change that had taken place in Kenneth Graham's prospects, owing to his uncle's marriage. Decency and a dread of public opinion compelled her, sorely against her will, to tolerate his visits. She revenged herself, however, by making them as unsatisfactory as possible.

Kenneth was never allowed to see Violet here in the presence of a third person, and sometimes of a fourth, for the Comte de Beauville spent a considerable portion of each day at Lady Montagu's house.

He was regarded by Violet with ill-concealed dislike and aversion; his carefully-planned

efforts to establish himself in her favour meeting with but little success.

But if Lady Montagu could not resort to actual force in getting rid of the young barrister, more delicate and diplomatic means were yet at her disposal.

He had told her frankly that he would never give Violet up until, of her own accord, she requested him to do so; failing that, he should consider their engagement as binding upon them as ever.

A keen, practised reader of human nature, Lady Montagu knew perfectly well that if Violet could once be induced to ask for her freedom, pride, and wounded love would make Kenneth Graham grant it without any further remonstrance.

To accomplish her object she must undermine the foundations of faith and love upon which Violet's firm allegiance to her lover was based.

What chance had a weak, trusting girl who knew nothing of the world against a clever, crafty woman, especially when that woman happened to be her mother?

Lady Montagu determined, in her own mind, that the undesirable engagement should yet be dissolved with Violet's entire consent, since in no other way could it be brought to an end.

Sarcastic speeches, vague insinuations, and a fearfully irritating system of ceaseless "nagging" were brought to bear upon the girl's brave spirit until her health began to suffer under the prolonged mental strain, and her nerves became unusually weak, although she steadfastly refused to capitulate. Kenneth to her was dearer than life itself.

"They are making it very hard for you, Violet," he remarked in a tone of angry compassion when they actually found themselves left in a state of undisturbed felicity for a brief space of time on the occasion of a ball to which they had both been invited. Lady Montagu had intrusted her daughter to the care of a friend, a nervous headache having prevented her from mounting guard over Violet as usual, and the lovers had wandered away into the conservatory, while the chamberlains were enjoying herself at the supper-table, fondly imagining Violet to be somewhere in the immediate vicinity.

"Never mind, they cannot force me to give way," she replied, with a wan little smile, although her pale face and the dark circles under her large eyes bore mute witness to what she had suffered on his behalf. "Perhaps, when mamma finds that I am not to be coerced, she will relent, and allow matters to resume their old aspect between us, Kenneth, dear. For the present we must be patient."

"I am thinking of you, not of myself," he continued, moodily. "It breaks my heart to know what you are made to endure every day on my account. Oh! why did that wretched old idiot suddenly take it into his head to get married! The burial service would have been more in his line. I never coveted his money or his title, Violet, until I ascertained what importance your mother placed upon both. I would give anything to possess them now in order to remove the barrier so cruelly erected between us."

"So long as we remain true to each other, Kenneth," she replied, soothingly, "no external circumstances will be able really to keep us apart; in heart and spirit we shall still be one."

"I am a selfish wretch, after all," he said reproachfully, as he bent down and kissed her sweet, fair face again and yet again. "You are doing your best to console and comfort me when you stand so sorely in need of help and comfort yourself. Oh, my Violet!" he continued, earnestly, "I am working hard, harder than I ever worked in my life before, to earn money enough to satisfy Lady Montagu's demands. I do not think she would have been quite so unyielding towards us if that fellow, the Comte de Beauville, with his enormous income, of which he has never really earned one franc, had not turned up again at an unlucky moment. Most men would regard him as a formidable rival, but I have unbounded confidence in the fidelity of the girl I love."

"I wish he would leave town and never come back again," said Violet, wearily; "he would

badly waste so many elegantly turned compliments upon me if he but knew how thoroughly I detest him."

"He is doing his best to supplant me," rejoined Kenneth, "and your mother fully sanctions the attempt. He is a mean hound, and if I could but enjoy the luxury of thrashing him soundly I should feel all the better for it, both in mind and body."

"A lawyer should not talk of breaking the peace," she replied, in a less desponding tone, "at least, he is only supposed to do such a thing according to legal rules when he invariably gets well paid for it and escapes all blame. Couldn't you contrive to involve the Comte de Beauville in a complicated law suit, Kenneth? That would be less risky than the thrashing."

"I should like to have him under cross-examination," said Kenneth, grimly. "I'd make it deucedly warm for him in return for his presumption in pestering you with his society so often."

"It is dreadfully annoying," replied Violet, "but with the knowledge of your love to give me fresh strength, neither mamma's remonstrances, nor the Comte de Beauville's unwelcome attentions, can effect any change in the resolve to which I adhere so firmly, and that is to remain true to you through all. Let us go back to the ball-room now, Kenneth dear, or we shall be missed."

Violet was very staunch in her allegiance to her lover, in spite of all the maternal persecution brought to bear upon her. But even her brave spirit quailed a little when, some few weeks after the above-mentioned episode, Kenneth Graham came to bid her good-bye before embarking for Calcutta.

He had been offered an enormous fee if he would consent to go to India for the purpose of defending a native prince who had been accused of appropriating public funds and otherwise misconducting himself. The temptation was too great to be resisted, the opportunity far too good to be neglected by a rising man, and Kenneth had decided to undertake the defence of the royal misdoer.

Could he but succeed, with the odds so greatly against him, in triumphantly asserting his client's fair fame, his legal reputation would be considerably enhanced, while his income would receive a valuable addition. Impatient in his desire to overcome the obstacles that Lady Montagu had thrown in the way of his marriage with Violet, he gladly availed himself of the short cut to fortune thus opened before him. The only drawback to it was the long separation from Violet that it involved.

Lady Montagu, for reasons of her own, was so pleased to hear of his approaching departure that she actually bade Kenneth a gracious farewell, and left the lovers in undisturbed peace during their final interview.

"Violet, darling, do not grieve so sorely," said Kenneth Graham beseechingly, as he hid her tearful face in her hands, and sobbed afresh. "I shall lose all heart for my work if I have to carry away with me the memory of such a sad farewell. Our parting will only be for a year at the longest; and time flies so quickly that you will soon have to be dwelling upon my return. I hope to bring back with me rupees and laurels enough to satisfy even your mother's requirements, and then our wedding will be the result. Are you afraid of the pressure that will be brought to bear upon you by others when I am gone?"

"No!" she replied, firmly. "I can bear that, or anything else for your sake, Kenneth. No amount of coercion will ever make me prove false to you. But I shall feel so lonely when you are no longer at hand to cheer and strengthen me, and the haunting dread of some evil, destined to arise during your absence, rests heavily upon me now."

"You are nervous and low-spirited," he said, cheerily. "You will be better by the time my first letter reaches you, full of Indian news. I shall write by every mail, and now I want you to let me see one of the old sunny smiles on your face before I go. A fearful parting would be but an ill-omen for us, love."

The days that immediately followed Kenneth's departure seemed long and dreary, indeed, to Violet. The arrival of his first letter, replete with amusing pencil-sketches, vivid description, and tender messages, served to console her in a measure while she waited eagerly for the second. That also came to hand in due course, but the following mail brought her nothing save disappointment. No welcome letter from Calcutta was placed in her little desk after being carefully read and re-read, and Kenneth's broken promise grieved her sorely.

"Mr. Graham is doubtless too much engaged to devote any of his time to letter-writing," Lady Montagu remarked, with smooth acerbity, that really covered a great deal of secret dread as she noted Violet's restless, unhappy condition, caused by her lover's inexplicable silence.

Mail after mail came in, bringing no letter for her, although the progress of the now celebrated trial, in which Kenneth Graham figured so prominently, owing to his cleverly conducted defence, was duly recorded in all the papers.

The tears caused by a fresh disappointment were still glistening in her eyes one morning when Lady Montagu entered the room with several well-known society journals in her hand, and a look of elaborate pity and commiseration on her thin high-bred face.

"Violet, my poor child," she began softly, "it is my painful duty to call your attention to an important announcement relating to Kenneth Graham that has only just come under my notice. I fear it is but too well authenticated. If so, you will regret that you did not take my advice, and break off your engagement with him long ago."

* Fearful of she knew not what Violet took the *Whitehall Review* from her mother's hand, and glanced at the paragraph indicated.

The news that nearly made her heart stop beating as she read was to the effect that Kenneth Graham, an eminent young barrister, had recently become engaged to a young and beautiful heiress, the daughter of an English gentleman with whom he had become acquainted soon after his arrival in India.

Their marriage, it was stated, would in all probability take place previous to his return, when bride and bridegroom would together seek their native land.

Mechanically Violet took up some of the other papers. All tended to confirm the statement contained in the first.

As she flung them aside with a sudden tremulous gesture, indicative of a sorely wounded heart, Violet thought bitterly that her own engagement had been comparatively unknown beyond the family circle.

How she lived through the terrible days that followed hard upon this, her first great sorrow, she scarcely knew, but she could never recall them afterwards without a shudder.

She knew, however, that Lady Montagu was universally kind and considerate to her, while the Comte de Beauville at first attempted nothing beyond mute, unobtrusive sympathy, or some little friendly attention.

He was too wary a diplomatist to injure his cause by making any decided advances until that deep, aching wound had in a measure become healed.

Kenneth Graham's conduct was to Violet a cruel riddle that no effort of hers could solve. More in sorrow than in anger she pondered over it by day and night without ever drawing any nearer to the truth.

The motive that had induced one, to all appearance so proud, so honourable and so loving, to act thus basely towards the woman of his choice was unknown to her, and the unexplained mystery that shrouded the whole affair served to render it doubly distressing.

Absorbed in her own grief, Violet failed to notice the Comte de Beauville's increasing tenderness of manner, or the worn, anxious look that constantly rested upon Lady Montagu's face. The former surprised her at length by a declaration of love, uttered in such earnest, impassioned tones that she could hardly recognise the

speaker as the cynical, self-contained Comte de Beauville.

She gave him a firm but gentle refusal, which he declined, however, to accept as final.

To Violet's extreme consternation, when she informed her mother of what had occurred, that stately dame broke down altogether, and implored her almost frantically to reconsider her decision.

"We are frightfully in debt," she said, "and your marriage alone can save us from utter ruin and disgrace. The Comte has promised to make the most liberal settlement in the event of your becoming his wife, and why should you refuse him since you are no longer engaged to Kenneth Graham? Violet, for my sake, if not for your own, accept him when next he asks you to do so. You will not surely let me come to want and poverty in my old age when it is in your power to rescue me from such a miserable fate."

Wearily, harassed, perplexed on all sides, Violet wavered, and then finally gave way to her mother's entreaties.

Had the old understanding still existed between her and Kenneth no power on earth would have induced her to accept the Comte de Beauville. But Kenneth had deserted her, and an act of self-sacrifice intended to benefit her mother could hardly render her sad young life more dreary.

She consented to become the Comtesse de Beauville, and Lady Montagu, released from her burden of anxiety, grew radiant with delight. Had she not secured five hundred a year for herself by her daughter's marriage, apart from other benefits?

The preparations for the wedding were hastened as much as possible, although neither lover nor mother could arouse Violet to take a keen interest in such important questions as the marriage settlements, the wedding tour, or the trousseau itself.

"Let it be as you like," was the invariable reply; and with the mere fact of her passive acquiescence in all their plans they were compelled to be content.

CHAPTER IV.

THE Comte de Beauville's marriage was a very quiet one, owing to the recent death of a near relative.

Violet went through the trying ordeal without manifesting the least emotion, although her face was strangely white and rigid; and Lady Montagu experienced a passing sensation of remorse as she contrasted her daughter's listless, uninterested air, so unusual in a fair young bride, with the glad, joyous tone, the eager anticipation of coming delight, that had characterised her but a few short months ago.

She comforted herself, however, with the reflection that Violet's extreme youth would soon enable her to cast aside the memory of her former love, and take a keen delight in the life of perpetual change and pleasure that would open out before her as the Comte de Beauville's wife.

She had never studied her child's nature; she knew but little of its capacity for hidden suffering and patient fidelity, and the liberal settlements had blinded her short-sighted eyes to almost everything else.

Violet's husband took her to Brittany for the honey-moon. Nearly all his relatives lived there, and he wished his bride to find favour in their sight.

The de Beauvilles received her with chilling reserve and distant courtesy. The Comte's marriage with an Englishwoman of good family, but no fortune, had annoyed them sorely.

"Since he must needs get married," they said among themselves, "he might at least have had the grace to marry one of his own country-women."

The Comte de Beauville, who soon grew weary of life in the country, seized the first opportunity to shift his quarters to Paris, and give Violet her first glimpse of that world-renowned capital.

Her beauty, grace, and high breeding, combined with her splendid gift of song, soon singled her out for special notice in society, and ere long she created a perfect furor.

The "best" people gladly accepted her invitation, and welcomed her as their guest in return. Flattered, flattered, caressed, sought after on all sides, Violet de Beauville became one of the most popular women of the day, and her husband exulted in her success, although his marriage had been the means of transforming him into a self-tormentor of the worst description.

He was still passionately in love with his beautiful young wife, and he had, moreover, conceived a vehement desire to obtain from her something beyond the mere respect and toleration that she had from the first accorded to him. What was the use of being able to call her his own, while her heart still remained in the keeping of another? An exquisitely wrought casket from which the jewel had been abstracted, leaving it empty, could hardly have been more unsatisfactory to its owner.

Then a reaction would set in, and tired of trying to arouse some warmer feeling for himself within her breast by fair means, he became cynical, morose, and generally unbearable.

But neither lower-like devotion nor invective, and studied neglect, produced any lasting impression upon Violet; she was dutiful to her husband, but she did not care enough for him to study his ever-varying moods.

She tried hard to put Kenneth Graham from her thoughts altogether, and yet she not unfrequently detected herself in the act of wondering whether he had returned to England, and, if so, whether she would some day be compelled to meet him with his wife in society.

But for those printed proofs of his faithlessness that she still possessed, the events of the last few months would have seemed to her like a bad dream from which she would presently awake to find herself Kenneth's affianced bride as of old.

Thus far in her married life Violet had felt grateful for the care and attention lavished upon her by the Comte de Beauville, and a little sorry that she could give him no more in return for all his devotion.

But the future held in store for her a revelation destined to destroy even the slight bond of union then existing between the ill-matched pair.

She was answering notes of invitation one day, during her husband's temporary absence, in a charming little room that looked out on to a sweep of heaven turf, adorned with sparkling jets d'eau of fantastic form, and great clusters of purple rhododendrons, when a visitor was announced, and Kenneth Graham, like a ghost from the past, stood before her.

He looked full ten years older than when she had last seen him. There were deep lines on his strong, fair face, while the old tender light had died out from his eyes, leaving them cold and hard in expression.

"Kenneth, you here!" Violet exclaimed, too much surprised to greet him with due formality.

"Yes," he replied, quietly, "I am here for the purpose of vindicating my honour, which, it appears, has suffered somewhat during my stay in India through a statement circulated without my knowledge, and which you, among others, were only too glad to avail yourself of."

"What statement do you allude to?" she inquired, faintly, a chill sense of some revelation about to be made when too late for it to be of any use coursing through her mind the while.

"I allude to the infamous falsehood that spoke of me as engaged, and about to be married to the daughter of a dear old friend since dead," he continued. "When this false statement was being actively circulated at home, by means of the society papers, I was working hard out in India to earn money and reputation for the sake of a woman who, previous to my departure, had promised to remain true to me through all temptations. I succeeded, and on the day of my final triumph I heard that the woman I loved, not wisely but too well, had become the Comtesse de Beauville. And yet, fool that I was,

to stake all my happiness upon her lightly-broken vow, I can yet afford to look down with scorn and contempt upon the knave who won her under false pretences."

"Do you mean to say that you are not engaged—that the reports circulated about you were utterly without foundation?" she said, with a calmness born of intense, awful despair.

"I do," he replied sternly. "They were only brought under my notice upon my return to England, and I have succeeded in tracing them to their source. They were the joint production of your mother and the Comte de Beauville—a pretty piece of authorship, ably edited."

"Oh, what have I done!" she moaned, as she sank back upon the velvet lounge, with a little wailing cry. "I have ruined my own life and yours as well, Kenneth! Heaven is my witness that I really believed all the rumours published concerning your engagement. At the time they went nigh to break my heart, otherwise I should not have consented to marry the Comte de Beauville."

"I can see it all now," she continued bitterly. "I was so young and inexperienced in the ways of the world that it was an easy matter for them to lead me astray. If the daily wretchedness of my life could be placed in contrast with the misery I have all unwittingly brought upon you, you would yet deem yourself amply avenged."

He did not doubt her words; they bore the stamp of truth and deep unavailing regret too plainly marked upon them for that.

"It is hard for us both," he said, in a gentler tone, "but you should have been less ready to believe such a preposterous story about me, Violet."

"I should not have believed it," she replied, "only the long silence on your part that preceded it led me to fear the worst. An occasional letter from you would have been sufficient to dispel all my doubts. I longed and prayed for tidings; I wrote to inquire the cause of your silence; why did you give me no answer!"

"I wrote to you by every mail," he said, vehemently. "I never missed once. Is it possible that my letters were withheld from you?"

"They must have been," she continued, a bright red anger spot beaming on each pale cheek as she spoke. "Kenneth, after your departure I only received two letters from you; I have them still. How dared they act so cruelly towards us!"

"They did their work thoroughly," he remarked, with a calmness that he was far from feeling. "Only three times was I permitted to hear from you, and your silence perplexed me sorely. I think that I have nearly laid bare all the duplicity they have been guilty of by this time. Even supposing me to be false to you, Violet, how could you consent to marry De Beauville?"

"I did it for my mother's sake," said Violet, slowly; "little dreaming what she had already done for me. She told me that unless I married the Comte de Beauville she would be brought to want and poverty in her old age. I thought you had forsaken me, and so, to satisfy her, caring but little what became of me in my desolation of heart, I married that man. But after what you have told me I will not, I cannot stay with him another day. Kenneth, what shall I do? Where shall I go to escape from him? You always helped me in time past, help me now in my hour of sorest need."

"The right to do is no longer mine," he replied, sadly. "Were I to help you in this delicate matter what would the world say? You must try to make the best of your life as it stands; any attempt on the part of the woman to free herself from the galling fetters of an unhappy marriage generally end in bringing obloquy upon her name. I can only counsel you to be patient."

"At least will you try to forgive me for my wrong judgment of you in the past!" she said, imploringly.

"I have already forgiven you," he replied, gently, although he was far too loyal to himself and her to allow the pent-up flood of love and tenderness in his heart to find vent in words. "I must leave you now," he continued, "and I cannot tell when it will be our lot to meet again."

Meanwhile, strive to bear your cross bravely, and remember that, if you seek it in the right direction, strength will be granted to you."

With various stormy passions contending for the mastery in his breast Kenneth Graham went out from the presence of the woman he still loved, and who had succeeded in vindicating her conduct in his sight. Half-way down the wide stone staircase, guarded by sculptured sphinxes on either side, he met the Comte de Beauville in the act of coming up.

The latter's *sang froid* seldom deserted him, but his pale face certainly turned a shade paler on beholding such an unexpected visitor.

"Ah! Mr. Graham," he said, airily, as he held out his hand which the other failed to notice. "To what are we indebted for such a pleasant surprise?"

"Liar and poltroon," returned the barrister, in clear, distinct tones that made themselves heard all too plainly; "mine has been the task to acquaint your wife of the deception you practised upon her previous to her marriage. Go upstairs, and comfort her now if your unblushing villainy will permit of your doing so."

"You have been making mischief between us, then!" he said with a cynical shrug of his expressive shoulders; "but it is in the way of your profession to do that, is it not, *mon ami*?"

"If you wish to keep a whole skin you will allow me to pass without any further remarks," rejoined Kenneth, with a curious twitching about the corners of his firmly closed lips.

"Gentlemen do not fight with their fists," said the Comte de Beauville, coolly; "but if you feel yourself aggrieved and wish for satisfaction I shall be happy to meet you to-morrow in the Bois de Boulogne."

"I object on principle to fight a duel," said the other. "In my opinion duelling is only a polite form of murder, sanctioned by man's laws, not by Heaven's. But I will unmask you in the face of society, and let all the world know what muddy channels blue blood may course through, before the end of another week."

"Your moral courage doubtless exceeds your physical daring since you refuse to fight," observed the Comte, with a decided sneer.

The words were hardly out of his mouth ere Kenneth Graham had closed with him, and the two men half-slipped, half-rolled to the bottom of the staircase in a firm embrace. Kenneth was the first to pick himself up, and then the Comte de Beauville knew that he had met his match. The Frenchman did not lack either strength or courage, but he was quite unable to defend himself against the other's vigorous attack. The short, thick cane that Kenneth carried for once in its life saw active service as it descended, time after time, upon the shoulders of his antagonist. Half-a-score of lacerations, attracted by the noise, hurried to the assistance of their master, but a single blow from Kenneth's strong arm sent them spinning back against the wall one after another in rapid succession. He had not intended to create such a scene, but his blood was up, and the Comte de Beauville's sneering remarks had done the rest.

Not until he was thoroughly exhausted did he take his departure, leaving the cane behind him as a souvenir of his visit. In his own hotel, with his own servants looking on, had the Comte de Beauville received, as the reward of his merits or rather demerits, a sound and well-behaved thrashing.

He kept his room for several days after that occurrence, but he could not prevent the humiliating affair from becoming known to the fashionable world, and creating a great deal of amusement. The change in his young wife's manner towards him, however, he deemed the worst blow of all, for it was not likely to heal.

CHAPTER V.

SUNLIGHT and song came flooding into Violet's luxuriously furnished dressing-room one bright spring morning, but they failed to awaken any echo of gladness in her breast. Upon the spirits of a really happy, healthy being such things act like champagne, the mood we are in really away-

ing us to laughter or tears more than any external influence.

Kenneth Graham's revelation of the treachery to which she had been subjected by her husband and mother had effectually prevented her from trying any longer to cultivate liking a respect for the man whose name she bore, even while she felt a sad satisfaction in knowing that her former lover had never in word or deed been faithless to her.

The Comte de Beauville had recovered from the effects of his thrashing. He strenuously attempted to prevent the most indirect allusion to it, especially when Violet was present, regarding him with serene, contemptuous eyes that he never dared to meet in their clear, steady glance.

Since his dishonourable conduct had become known to her, Violet had at least escaped the annoyance of her husband's ceaseless attentions and imperious claims upon her affections. He could but perceive that love, after what had occurred, was out of the question between them, and he treated her, as a general rule, with distant courtesy, although what it cost him to maintain such an attitude towards her she never knew.

Lady Montagu had experienced a great deal of uneasiness on hearing of the encounter that had taken place in Paris between her son-in-law and Kenneth Graham.

The interview that the latter insisted on having with her later on, when he demanded the return of his intercepted letters, and reproached her sternly for the part she had played towards him, did not tend to reassure her.

She had cherished the fond delusion that the young barrister, on hearing of Violet's marriage, would efface her image from his heart without more ado, and look in some other direction for a wife. Not once had she thought him capable of exposing her plans and working so much mischief.

Violet sat in front of her glass brooding, as she frequently did now, over the bondage that grew more hateful to her each day that she was called upon to endure it.

The saddest fate that can befall any human being is that which dooms them to pass their existence in the society of one towards whom they entertain a sentiment bordering closely upon hatred; and such a fate had befallen Violet, bringing thick and misty gloom into what should have been the glad springtime of her life.

The Comte de Beauville was really the author of all the misery that Kenneth Graham and she herself had been called upon to endure. Yet knowing this, she had to meet him day by day, to go out into society with him, and constantly to endure his presence. The intense longing for freedom that underlay all her icy self-control was working its way to the surface though, and threatened soon to take some definite form. At least it was in her power to go far away from her present home of splendid misery, and, under an assumed name, earn her own living in comparative peace and happiness among strangers.

She was turning the subject over in her mind for the hundredth time, when her maid informed her that a woman, named Marie Durand, wished to see her.

"What does her business with me consist of, Fellein?" inquired the Comtesse.

"She will not say," replied the maid; "but she is most earnest in her request to be admitted to the presence of madame; possibly it is charity that she requires."

"Tell her to come in," said Violet; and then a thin, dark-eyed, middle-aged Frenchwoman, with the wan, earnest *spirituelle* expression so frequently to be seen upon the faces of women belonging to the lower classes in France, entered the room.

"What can I do for you?" inquired Violet kindly, as the door closed upon the retreating figure of the maid.

"Madame la Comtesse, for myself I require nothing," said the woman in that imitable tone which is at once free, confident, and deferential. "It is for the sake of others that I have tried so

hard to gain speech with you this morning upon a matter of life or death. You are, I know, far too good, too noble to betray the secret that I am about to reveal to you."

"You may confide in me without any fear as to the result," rejoined Violet, wonderingly. What secret of moment could this strange woman have to impart?

"Is it known to you that the Comte de Beauville, your husband, belongs to a secret society, called 'Le Rayon du Soleil'?" inquired Marie Durand, eagerly.

"He may belong to the society you mention without my being aware of it," replied Violet, indifferently. "Many of the Comte de Beauville's private affairs are unknown to me."

"The society includes men of every rank in life," continued the Frenchwoman; "and my husband, a small shopkeeper, was some time ago persuaded to join it. Of late he has been strangely restless and uneasy in manner, but not until last night did I learn the real cause for his unusual behaviour. Then he talked in his sleep, and I pieced the broken scraps together till the dreadful truth stood clearly revealed to me. The Comte de Beauville has transgressed against the rules of the society, he was proved a traitor to the cause it seeks to propagate, and the penalty is death. They drew lots, it appears, to see who should carry out the sentence, and the lot fell to my husband's share. He is a quiet, peaceable man; and the fact of being compelled to shed blood preys greatly upon his mind."

"Did you ascertain if any time had been appointed for the assassination?" Violet inquired, with a strange gleam as of fire in her dark eyes.

"Yes, the Comte is to be shot to-night on his way home from the opera-house," rejoined her companion. "And now, dearest lady, you who are known to be so good and generous, will you warn him of his danger, and beseech him to leave Paris at once without revealing to him the source from which you have gained your information? Since I have endeavoured to save your husband from death, will you in turn do all you can to shield mine from injury or detection? You will remember that he is bound to obey the commands of the society if he would not bring down upon himself a similar sentence."

"I will do the best I can under the circumstances," said Violet, reassuringly; "and I will certainly keep your husband's name in the background; no harm shall accrue to him through your disclosure. Does he know of your visit to me this morning?"

"Certainly not!" replied Madame Durand. "I feared to increase his perplexity by letting him know that he had unwittingly betrayed such an important secret. I determined to come here on my own responsibility, and do my best to prevent the terrible deed under contemplation from ever taking place."

"And you were quite right; you have acted very wisely, and I am grateful to you for what you have done," said Violet, taking a small gold cross from her dressing-case as she spoke, and placing it in the other woman's hand. "You must accept this as a little memento of what has just passed between us, and now you may safely leave the whole affair to me. I shall know best how to conduct it."

Marie Durand uttered a few words of heartfelt gratitude, bent down to kiss Violet's hand in her swift, graceful French fashion, and then discreetly vanished from the room.

Left to herself Violet looked the door to prevent interruption, while a sensation of mingled awe and lurid gladness overpowered her, as the means by which her long-desired freedom might speedily be obtained stood plainly revealed before her.

She had but to turn a deaf ear to Marie Durand's statement to let circumstances develop themselves without any interference on her part, and before the dawn of another morning the man who had cheated and tricked her into becoming his wife would have ceased to exist.

To remain passive and inactive, to utter no word of warning to the doomed man would be merely a negative crime after all, whispered an

evil voice, while his cruel conduct towards her really justified such a reprisal. Did not the freedom for which her soul pined and thirsted depend almost entirely upon it?

But, on the other hand, would not freedom itself, purchased at the cost of one man's death and the other's crime, eventually become a more terrible bondage than any that she had ever yet known?

If trouble not of her own causing was hard to bear, how could she ever sustain such a burden of sin and remorse as must needs descend upon her if she allowed the Comte de Beauville to go blindly to meet his fate?

Hour after hour she paced restlessly up and down the room, regardless of the flight of time, while hatred and forgiveness, duty and inclination, alternately struggled within her for the mastery.

She was hard pressed indeed when the words that Kenneth Graham had spoken on the occasion of their last meeting recurred to her with startling clearness. "Strive to bear your cross bravely, and remember that if you only seek it in the right direction, strength will be granted unto you."

Tempted, storm-tossed, utterly weary, she threw herself upon her knees and sought that higher aid by means of which so many quiet victories are daily won, while its absence serves to account for so many inglorious defeats.

The struggle was over, and Violet had decided upon her course of action before she rose from that suppliant position.

She felt tired and exhausted, for the mental conflict had been a long one; but there was a quiet, restful fervour of peace and happiness within her heart to which she had been a stranger since the days of her untroubled girlhood.

The Comte de Beauville nearly dropped the ivory-backed brush he held in his hand when his wife entered his dressing-room that evening. Not once a year was she in the habit of paying a visit to her husband's apartments.

"Henri, it will be advisable for you to alter your plans and stay away from the opera to-night," she began, quietly.

"Indeed!" he replied, with a swift, inquiring glance. "It is something new for you to evince any interest in my engagements. May I ask why you wish me to lose such a good representation of *Faust*, with Nillon as Marguerite, *ma belle femme*?"

"Because, if you go, it will be at the risk of your life," she continued, briefly explaining the plot against him that had been brought under her notice, but taking care to suppress the names of those immediately concerned in it.

The Comte de Beauville's face grew deadly pale as she proceeded. He knew the full extent of the danger that surrounded him.

"That cursed society again," he muttered, peevishly. "How I wish that I had never joined it. I shall have to leave Paris at once, since those fellows have got their knife into me for betraying some of their far-fetched impossible plans, and bringing them under the notice of the Government. How did this news reach you?" he continued, turning sharply upon his wife.

"I am not at liberty to reveal the name of my informant," she rejoined. "In return for the information given, I promised to keep that strictly secret."

"I wonder that you, of all people, should exert yourself to rescue me from such an undesirable fate," he remarked, with an unpleasant smile. "You care less than nothing for me, and my death would serve to release you from a marriage that you have always more or less disliked."

"You have forfeited all right to expect either love or liking from me," said Violet, proudly; "but when everything else has been blown to the winds, duty between a husband and wife still remains. Hence the warning that you have just received from my lips; no other motive would have induced me to open them."

He regarded her for a moment in mute amazement; a woman who placed duty before everything else was a new revelation to him.

"Yours is a noble nature, Violet," he remarked.

in a less mocking tone, "and I wish from my heart that you cared more for me. Are we always to remain apart by reason of the deception I helped to practise upon you previous to our marriage? Cannot you afford to overlook it when you remember the passionate love that prompted me to sacrifice even my honour rather than allow you to drift away from me for ever?"

"Love without honour is but a poor gift to place at any woman's feet," said Violet, as she turned to depart. "The past contains that which must always serve as a barrier between us, although I shall continue to fill my position as your wife, and discharge the duties that position entails upon me to the best advantage."

The Comte de Beauville did not go to the opera that night, and he left Paris early the next morning, thereby exonerating Marie Durand's husband from the painful task imposed upon him by his superiors.

Meanwhile in England things were not going very well with Kenneth Graham. Intense application to work as a remedy against useless regrets and memories full of pain, nightly brews of strong green tea, and the excessive use of wet towels, had resulted in a serious attack of brain fever.

As he slowly crept back to life and consciousness it was only to ascertain from the doctor that many months must yet elapse ere he handled another brief, while his enfeebled brain would prevent him from attacking anything more abstruse than a three-volume novel.

The fickle world was already beginning to forget him, other men were crowding into his vacant place, and his cup of bitterness fairly ran over when the birth of Lord Fossilton's son and heir was announced to him at the request of that ancient and highly delighted nobleman through the useful medium of the penny post.

CHAPTER VI.

It is possible for a man to be brave as a lion in one respect, and yet at the same time to be guilty of absolute cowardice in another. The Comte de Beauville's state of mind subsequent to the unpleasant warning conveyed to him by his wife served to prove the truthfulness of this assertion beyond the reach of a doubt.

It would have troubled him but little had he been called upon to fight a duel with another man, or even to meet an acknowledged enemy openly upon the field of battle.

But the knowledge that a slouching, determined stealthy figure might be following him wherever he went, waiting its opportunity to take his life not from any motive of personal hatred or revenge, but as the instrument used by calm, passionless, abstract justice to accomplish its ends, told fearfully upon his nerves, as the long glowing days of summer flitted by.

Such a mysterious, shadowy foe could not be grappled with, or even guarded against. The attack must perforce come when it was least expected, and the vague uncertainty, the constant dread connected with it, rendered it doubly harassing.

Never caring to remain long in one place, he bade fair to become a "globe-trotter" of the most approved type.

As a rule, he shunned great cities, and chose out-of-the-way towns and villages for his temporary residence, until Violet thought there could hardly be a dreamy, old-world, shadow-hunted nook upon the continent still unknown to them.

And yet go where he would the Comte de Beauville was obliged to acknowledge to himself the futile nature of all his precautions against discovery.

Had he not sat in the council from which his own sentence had proceeded helping to judge others?

Could he fail to remember with what vigilant, unweary skill and deliberate purpose each man had been traced by the emissaries of the society and sent to his last account?

It was but a matter of time, he told himself,

sometimes with a shrug, and yet he did his utmost, to extend the span of life still remaining to him by throwing his enemies off the scent and doubling, like some hunted thing, when the yelling pack is close upon it.

One benefit at least had accrued to him since his banishment from Paris, owing to the fiat issued against him by the secret society. Violet, perceiving the wretchedness of the life he was compelled to lead, and the effect it produced upon him, grew kinder and less reserved in her bearing towards him.

Urged by compassion she strove to aid and reassure the husband she had never loved, as the dread of assassination grew yet stronger upon him, and he was grateful to her for the forgiveness and clemency thus displayed.

He became suspicious of almost everyone with whom the course of daily life brought him in contact.

His young wife, upon whom he had once practised such a cruel piece of deceit, was the only being that he allowed himself to place absolute confidence in; her fidelity had been proved beyond the reach of doubt.

Violet assented to all his frequently altered plans, and after wandering from place to place for nearly a year, living meanwhile in a chronic state of packing and unpacking, much to the disgust of Violet's French maid, the Comte expressed a desire to revisit Nice, then in the full glory of its flower-crowned summer.

They had only been there a week when he fell ill of a low, nervous fever, the result of a long-continued mental strain and unrest.

A vigorous constitution might have surmounted such an illness, but the Comte de Beauville had abused his in years gone by, and he had no reserve fund of strength to fall back upon in time of sickness.

The doctors who were called in looked grave, and gave provokingly ambiguous answers to all questions put to them by Violet regarding the patient's condition. He might recover, they said, but the fever had taken such firm hold of him that the result was extremely doubtful.

The Comte de Beauville's clear, penetrating sense, that it was so difficult to hoodwink, alone told him that he was dying. Indirectly the secret society had effected its purpose, and the easy, luxurious life that he loved so well was slipping away from him hour by hour.

One day, when the fever had reduced him to a mere shadow of his former self, Violet sat by her husband's bedside, watching him as he lay there in troubled, unquiet sleep. She was in constant attendance upon him now, since he looked to her for everything, and grew fretful if she absented herself from him for ever so short a time.

He roused her from the sad reverie into which she had fallen by starting up suddenly in bed, and exclaiming,—

"Violet, Violet, why don't you drive them away! They won't go at my bidding. Don't you see them standing there, with that hateful smile of triumph on their evil faces! They will madden me! Why do you let them stand all round the bed waiting for the end? Have you no pity, that you can look calmly on without making an effort to rescue me from them?"

"There is nothing here to alarm you, Henri," she said, soothingly, as she took his hot, dry hand in her own soft, cool one. "You have been dreaming, and your sick fancy has conjured up all those dreadful phantoms."

"Perhaps so," he replied, a little ashamed of the emotion he had displayed, as consciousness reasserted itself within him; "but it was a fearful dream. Violet, my old nurse, a peasant woman, brimful of quaint fancies and superstitions, once told me that when a man is about to die, all the deeds of his past life take bodily form and stand around him—the good deeds as angels, the bad ones as demons. I thought just now that the events of my life had taken personal shape, and were gathering round me; but there were no angels among them. No, not one!"

(Continued on page 570.)

ROSAMOND'S HUSBAND.

CHAPTER XV.

COLONEL BRAND, as well as all the magnates in the neighbourhood, called upon Lord Kingsford, and he duly returned their visits and announced that he had come to settle in the country for some time.

His antecedents were wrapped in mystery; but when a man is rich, very rich, titled, young, and unmarried, people are not too searching in their inquiries.

He was, as everyone could see, a perfect gentleman. He was clever and well educated, and he told someone quite casually, who told it to dozens of others, that he had been poor enough in his day; and his coming in for the property and title was a most unexpected piece of fortune.

He further stated that he had spent some years abroad, and knew a little of the colonies, but queries, delicate hints or artistic feelers with regard to Lady Kingsford met with no response.

The housekeeper, a plump old lady, with a generous figure and a front, had told inquiring friends that she had never heard of her.

Tommy did not remember her, only an old woman called "Mother Nan," and there was no picture of her anywhere, for between ourselves his lordship's dressing room and writing-table had been rigorously searched, and no photograph of any lady was to be found.

He did not care for ladies, it was commonly reported, nor for the sex, young or old. He read, he rode about the farms, he shot, he fished, and he led a very quiet, domestic kind of life, with Tommy for his only companion.

They looked an odd couple, Colonel Brand declared, having suddenly dropped in to lunch one wet afternoon, in that great paneled dining-room, with three men in waiting—Lord Kingsford at the foot of the table, looking on and crumbling biscuits; whilst Tommy, in a high chair with a pinafore tucked well round him, was doing a great business with his pudding and a spoon, this being his dinner-hour.

"Must be lonely work for you," said Colonel Brand, gobbling down mulligatawny as he spoke. "First class soup this, as good as I'd get in India. Wonder you don't marry again, eh?"

Lord Kingsford looked at his guest with a cool, measured glance that the latter did not relish, and felt that his host considered that he had been guilty of a liberty.

"You said that young Handcock had a couple of sound young horses, did you not?" was the only remark that he made, and Colonel Brand, glad to see that there was a loophole for other conversation, flung himself headlong into the question of young and likely hunters for the coming season, and discussed points and prices.

"I know a good deal about the matter, you see," he frankly stated; "for Rosamond, that's my step daughter, is a wonderful girl to ride to hounds, and of course I've to see she's always well mounted. Money no object," rather ostentatiously.

"I suppose not," acquiesced his host, politely.

"By Jove, no! that girl, my dear sir, has six thousand a-year of her own," helping himself to stewed oysters as he spoke. "Not bad for a single lady, eh?"

"Not! not bad," replied the other, abstractedly—he was repeating to himself as he glanced at Tommy, "six thousand a-year, and she grudged seven shillings a week for the support of her child."

"Yes! six thousand a-year!" proceeded Colonel Brand, unctuously. "Of course she has had dozens of offers; Italian marquises, French dukes, English lords, and would not have anything to say to one of them; she's devilish hard to please, I'm always telling my wife she'll never marry. She's waiting for something like the man in the moon. She's not very strong, and if anything were to happen to her of course it would be a great thing."

for the next heir—the not being married. You understand?"

"Of course," politely. "I understand perfectly," assented Colonel Brand's host, while Rosamond's next heir drummed away loudly on his empty plate with his empty spoon.

It cleared in the afternoon, and Colonel Brand, who never wanted anything for the taking, suggested that Lord Kingsford should drive him back to Violet Hill, and have a cup of tea and chat with the girls.

The matter was put before him in a way there was no getting out of, and he submitted to his fate, and was soon bowling along in a very high dog-cart with Colonel Brand, smoking one of his best cigars, in a state of beatitude beside him.

Here he was bringing home the great catch of the county in his train, in spite of the cool way he had received the little hint about a second wife.

As they turned in at the avenue they overtook Rosamond, riding, and the trotting on the gravel behind him made her light-hearted, thorough-bred plunge in a manner that would have unseated a less experienced rider; and yet, as Allan told himself, in those old days at Drydd she had never even been on the back of a donkey!

However, she evidently had it in her to be a most accomplished horsewoman. It was only latent, like a good many other things.

She had already sprung to the ground when the dog-cart dashed up to the door, and she received them on the steps, looking charming in her well-fitting blue habit.

Beside her stood a big collie dog, no other than "Laddie." She had not got rid of him, thought Allan, which was strange; and, stranger still, Laddie knew him.

He accosted him with a loud bark, and sprang up on him with every appearance of delighted recognition.

"Down, Laddie, down!" cried Rosamond, raising her whip. "I never saw him do that to a stranger before. One would almost fancy that he knew you," laughing.

"Almost!" returned Allan, laconically, following her into the hall, and thence into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Brand and Amy were entertaining a roomful of company to five o'clock tea.

Lord Kingsford was received with effusion by the hostess, who made room for him on an ottoman opposite to her, and Rosamond found a low chair pushed forward for her by a tall, fair young man, one of her avowed admirers.

There were half a dozen other people present, chatting in groups. A heavy-looking dowager shared the sofa with Mrs. Brand—a lady who lived on gossip—who was delighted to meet the new Lord Kingsford, and thirsting to question him about his wife.

"What a sweet little boy that is of yours! I saw him out on his pony yesterday," she said, when she had got an opening, in a high, reedy voice. "I hope you have a satisfactory nurse?"

"Tolerably, I believe, thanks."

"Did you engage her yourself?"

"Yes," wondering what on earth she was driving at.

"I suppose she had first-rate discharges?"

"Yes, fairly good."

"Only fairly good?" aghast.

"Well, I suppose they were the usual thing."

"One cannot be too careful, especially a young man inexperienced like you, Lord Kingsford, in selecting a nurse for a motherless child," said the old lady, impressively.

"Yes, yes, of course, I know that; and I chose this woman for her face; that goes a long way with me."

An awful pause, and then Mrs. Brand said, indignantly,—

"I'm afraid it does with most young men, but," in answer to a violent nudge from her companion, "I think a pretty young girl is not suitable for—"

"Who said she was a pretty young girl?" interrupted Lord Kingsford, indignantly. "I'm sure I did not! She's as old as the hills, as old as you are, Mrs. Brand." (Mrs. Brand did not quite like this.) "You fancied that I was look-

ing for a good looking young woman! *Honi soit qui mal y pense.* I was thinking of an elderly person, with a good countenance, who would be likely to be kind to the little chap."

"It is very few fathers who make as much fuss about a child as you do, Lord Kingsford," said Mrs. Brand, soothingly; "and I'm sure it says a good deal for you. Another young man would pack the boy off to live in some family till he was old enough to go to school, and amuse himself about the world as a bachelor."

"Yes," returned Lord Kingsford, abstractedly.

"I suppose his mother died when he was born?" said the heavy old lady, in a low and semi-confidential tone of voice, looking at him sharply. "In such cases very often the child is greatly disliked. I knew an instance in my own experience where the husband has never looked at the child to this day, and swears he never will. Your—I mean Lady Kingsford—died in the same way, I suppose?"

"No," hastily glancing at his wife, who, looking in the best of health and spirits, was gaily conversing with the fair young officer, brushing crumbs from her habit with her whip, and yet managing to take in the drift of the conversation between Lord Kingsford and two old ladies, "no nothing of the kind; and, seeing they were both about to plunge at him open-mouthed with legions of commiserating questions, he added, very gravely, 'I never speak of my wife; it is a painful subject.'"

"Oh, of course, of course; we can understand that. What are you going to soon?"

Allan remarked to himself that he should rather think he was going; he was not inclined to allow himself to be cross-examined by these two old scandal-mongers. Goodness knows what they would ask next; and, having promised to dine at "Violet Hill" on an early day, and taken leave of Amy and Rosamond; he got himself safely out of the room, and was soon bowling homewards.

"He has a look of Allan," said Rosamond to herself, as she divested herself of her riding-habit, and let down her long hair over her shoulders, and prepared for dinner. "Yes," speaking to herself in the glass, "it is a strange resemblance, but not so strong as it was the first day, I am thankful to say. That struck me in a manner that was quite painful, that absolutely haunted me. I wonder very much," addressing her reflection, as she slowly twisted up her great coils of golden brown hair, "I do wonder, and I'm not often inquisitive, what is the mystery about his wife!"

CHAPTER XVI

THE archery ball was a great feature in society in the neighbourhood of Armine Court.

There was not much archery, it is true, but old traditions were kept up, and this was quite one of the best, if not the best, county ball, and was always well attended.

People brought immense "house" parties from long distances—the band and supper came from London. It was held in the local town-hall, and no expense or trouble was ever spared to make it a thorough-going success.

Of course the Brand family went to it, and so did Rosamond and Amy—Rosamond in clouds of pale blue tulle, over blue silk, caught up with pale pink roses—a French costume, the prettiest in the room, and probably the most costly.

"See what it is to be rich!" said Amy, with an envious sigh, as her friend came into the room just before they started. "What a perfect frock! The roses look like real roses, the body fits you like a glove, the skirt hangs just as it ought to—just clears the ground, and what sweet blue shoes and blue silk stockings!"

"You look just as well in your own way, Amy. That white dress of yours is very fresh and becoming."

"Yes, yes," discontentedly; "but it's not like yours."

No; no more than her face was like that of

the beautiful weaver of the blue dress, who was to her as the sun is to the pale moon, and who eclipsed her little friend wherever she went.

"I do hope Lord Kingsford will be there," said Amy, as she fastened her gloves, "and asked me to dance."

"I suppose he will," said the other, coolly. "But why are you so particularly anxious?"

"Oh," blushing, "I think he is so awfully nice; just the nearest thing I have ever met to my beau ideal," looking rather conscious.

"You have had so many beau ideals," said her friend, smiling; "at least six since I have known you."

"Well, at least you must admit that you have seldom met with any one as nice in every way as he is," with a pout. "He might even please you, who are so hard to satisfy—only, with a little malicious laugh, 'for a wonder, he does not seem to like you. Most extraordinary, is it not!'"

This same and very novel experience had occurred to Rosamond herself; so she merely coloured, and said nothing.

"Yes, my dear; I see you noticed it, too. It was so odd, the night he dined here he never spoke to you. I remarked it; and when you came near him he moved away. And yet, strange to say, I observed him watching you intently several times when you could not see him. Such a strange look! I could not understand it, and when you sang he sat in rather an out-of-the-way chair, with his back to the light, and you sang that song, 'Then you'll remember me.' I could feel somehow—I can't explain—that it affected him, not to tears, of course, but he looked as if his mind was very far away, and his thoughts were sad. I have a theory about him and you. Would you like to hear it? Quite a romantic theory, too!"

"I would like you to hurry, my good girl! What ages you have been with those twelve-button gloves! I call them a sinful waste of time."

"I think, Rosie, that you must be very like his wife that is dead, and that is the reason he always keeps away from you; and yet, in spite of himself, he cannot help looking at you, when he can do so unnoticed. What do you think?"

"Perhaps so," returned Rosamond, advancing to the cheval glass for a last fond look, and arranging her necklet.

"She must have been lovely if she was like you, Rosie," said Amy, contemplating her friend, gravely. "You are far the prettiest girl I ever saw; and you hold yourself so well and have such a pretty figure!"

"I feel quite set up in compliments for the whole night," returned Rosamond, laughing. "I know I am what is called 'fair to see,' but some way or other, strange as it may seem, I care very little for my pretty face. There was a time when it was different."

"And when was that?" inquired Amy, eagerly, for Rosamond, the most generous, and good-natured, and unselfish of girls, was very close about her own feelings and her own affairs.

"Never mind, dear," kissing her, "there's the carriage coming round on the gravel. We must be off. You know how Colonel Brand goes on if the horses are kept waiting! A bear was a joke to him!"

In this instance the horses were not long detained, and soon the little quartette were stepping out at the town-hall, which was already crowded, and the band was playing the third dance as they entered the room.

Rosamond was speedily the centre of an eager knot of partners—would-be partners—and in a few moments her card was full, and two seconds later she was floating round the room to the "Officers' waltz."

She danced beautifully, as lightly as a feather, as gracefully as a professional; and Allan, who was leaning against a doorway, could not keep his eyes from following the blue dress dancing with the Hussar uniform.

Miss Glen, who paused beside him in a pouting condition, not being nearly as fleet of foot nor as long-winded as her friend, interpreted his gaze, and said,—

"Yes, I see you are admiring Rosie's dancing."

Is it not quite a treat to see! She's never put out of step, and I believe is quite too perfect a partner."

"So I should imagine."

"Do you not dance yourself?" she asked, appealingly.

"No, no, only squares, for duty."

"Then why do you come to a ball?" smiling.

"To take old ladies down to supper, and make myself useful."

"I am sure that is very kind and considerate of you," said a familiar voice beside him.

Rosamond, who had paused for an instant in the neighbourhood, felt not a little piqued that this man, of all others, for whom she felt a kind of odd attraction, partly because of the strange look of Allan, should avoid her so pointedly, treat her so coolly, so almost rudely, she told herself, indignantly.

She was not used to such manners; she was accustomed to find all men her slaves, and she made up her mind that this mysterious young widower should not be the exception.

Later in the evening she was tired, and excusing herself from dancing the Highland schottische, she and her partner stood round in a circle among the lookers-on.

Glancing behind her she saw a sofa in a niche, and on it, taking no apparent interest in the gay Scotch dance, Lord Kingsford.

He was sitting quite at his ease, leaning back against the couch, one leg crossed over the other, watching, not the dance, for the crowd was standing between him and it three or four deep—no, not troubling himself about the schottische, but watching her.

"What did he mean?"

Acting on a sudden and wholly unaccountable impulse, she walked over, leaving her partner quite unconscious of her departure; and standing just before him said—

"Tell me, Lord Kingsford, what you see in me that you have favoured me with so much attention. Do I remind you of anyone?"

Lord Kingsford sprang to his feet at once, and with a visible effort tried to laugh off her question! but he failed to parry Rosamond's curiosity.

She was like somebody, for he looked quite pale and unusually agitated, as he endeavoured to evade her salient.

"You do not deny that you take an interest in watching me?"

"Who would not?" he returned, with a deep bow.

"No, no! I don't want any compliments!" putting up her fan with an imperious gesture; "but I have noticed this, and so has Amy. I am very like somebody you know, or once knew, and my curiosity for once is insatiable. Who was she?"

"You can guess!" returned Lord Kingsford, gravely, looking steadily at the beautiful, smiling face before him. How like and yet how unlike the wild rose of Drydd Marches! This was an exquisite hot-house flower!

"I see, I understand. But then, why do you, or is that the reason you always avoid me, and are sometimes downright rude?"

"Rude! Miss Dane, colouring. 'I'm sorry you should think so. You are not in earnest.'"

"Of course I am," nodding her head with a smile of decision.

"I am exceedingly sorry. What can I do to—"

"Appease my suspicions," she suggested, with a smile. "Take me at once out of this broiling room, and get me a strawberry ice!"

Two minutes later they had left the room, arm-in-arm, made their way through the crowd; and Rosamond, in a little palmey bower, was eating an ice, with Lord Kingsford in reluctant attendance.

"How stifling that room was! How relieved I am to get away!" she remarked, as she nibbled at a wafer.

"What will your partners say? You seemed to be engaged three deep all the evening?"

"Oh, I'm tired of dancing, and I am not going to trouble myself about them!" she returned, with perfect sang froid.

"Not even about the gallant Hussar with whom you danced three times?" in a tone of ironical incredulity.

"Not even about the gallant Hussar you mention, and one would think you were my chaperone, Lord Kingsford! You seem to have watched me pretty closely. All partners are the same to me," holding out her little spoon. "If they dance well I look upon them all as so many dancing machines—that's all!"

"And those like me, who don't dance. What kind of machines do you call us?" pulling his moustache, reflectively.

"Talking machines!" she rejoined, promptly.

"And are there any flirting machines?" he inquired, significantly.

"I really cannot tell you! I know nothing about them!" she responded, resuming her gloves, with much deliberation.

"And never flirted in your life, I suppose?" sarcastically.

"No never!"

"Nor ever had a love affair or a lover?" with an ill-concealed sneer.

"I did not say that," she returned, as a wave of scarlet dyed her face and neck, and then as suddenly passed away. What was there in this man's face and manner that impelled her to him, to tell him things she did not want to reveal, to be quite frank and outspoken, in spite of herself.

"Ah! I see you have had an experience!" he observed, dryly.

"I have. All people have—girls I mean—and I am twenty-two, getting quite old. You are not my father confessor, and I am not going to commit myself any further. It is time for you to tell me a few things about yourself now."

"What would you like to know? I am only too much honoured."

"Well, really, now you ask me, I can't exactly say. You do not like speaking of your wife?" glancing at him interrogatively.

"No," in a very unpromising tone.

"But I am like her."

"Yes," becoming rather pale.

"How long was it ago?"

"Some years."

"I suppose she was quite young—a mere girl, poor thing?"

"Yes," without raising his eyes from the ground.

"And your little boy, you have him, though; and every one says you are a model father."

"Very kind of everyone," he returned, stiffly.

"How old is Tommy?"

"He was four his last birthday."

And her child, if it had lived, would have been the same age. It did not escape her companion that her lips trembled, her eyes filled with tears, and that she suddenly raised her fan before her face. But in another moment she was as gay and as smiling as ever, and, rising and picking up her bouquet, said—

"I suppose I ought to go back. I've three partners for the next waltz, and my card is in an awful muddle. Don't you ever dance?"

"Never, now," significantly.

"I suppose you did with her. I ought not to say these things to you, Lord Kingsford," she remarked, apologetically, as she felt his arm, on which her hand lay, give a little shake. "But I must tell you this; something I cannot account for makes me say these things, whether I will or not. Something made me come and speak to you to-night. I feel as if you were not a stranger, and besides all this, you have a look in your eyes of—of—somebody," in a faltering voice.

"Who was that?" he said, pausing abruptly in the passage leading to the ball-room, and speaking in an odd, abrupt voice.

"Somebody you have never heard of, will never see or hear of, nor shall I. Somebody," speaking in so low a tone that he could scarcely catch her next sentence, "somebody who ruined my life, and broke my heart."

"Now, now, Miss Dane," said a cheery voice behind them, "do you know that this is my dance, and that I've been all over the place hunting for you this half-hour! It's nearly done

now," in an aggrieved tone; "however, we might get one turn."

So Rosamond was led away, and Lord Kingsford, as he leant in a doorway and watched her dancing, said to himself,—

"No wonder she feels as if she were not speaking to a stranger. No wonder she speaks frankly to me. Did she but know—and what was that she said, I could not catch it, something about somebody, and life and heart. She sees a resemblance, so she has not quite forgotten me, not entirely expunged Allan Gordon from her mind, as she did poor Tommy! Heaven and earth! what would all the old gossips, ay, and young ones too, say if I were to announce that the pretty Miss Dane, the belle of the evening, the best dancer, the most popular girl in the room, is Tommy's mother."

CHAPTER XVII.

ALLAN and Rosamond met one another frequently during the next month, either at tennis parties, dinner parties, on the roads, riding or driving, and every Sunday on the church steps, weather permitting.

The conversation at the dance had seemed to create a crisis in the relations of Rosamond and Lord Kingsford. She was becoming more and more conscious of the influence he exercised over her, and yet she somehow did not dare to analyse it. She was at a loss to discover the real reason of her increased interest in him; her mental attitude towards him amazed herself. She was astounded that she could again find interest in the coming and going, the words and looks, of any man, after her bitter experience; and yet here was the bare plain truth.

Strange to say, the attraction was not mutual; her new acquaintance never sought her society of his own accord. He might accidentally be thrown into her company, but that was another matter.

It was to little Amy Glen he paid the most attention, if he could be said to single out any lady in the neighbourhood, and Amy (who was a susceptible young person) was elated and enraptured by the fact beyond all bounds.

"I wonder very much," she remarked, rather curiously, one day, "what it is that Lord Kingsford sees in me! I'm not nearly as pretty as you are, Rose," she added, frankly, "and yet it is to me he always comes and talks, when you and I are out together. Isn't it very odd?" she asked, eagerly.

Rosamond in her secret heart thought it was most unaccountable, and it was not the first nor the twentieth time she made the same mental remark; but the fact was patent, not merely to her own sensitive understanding, but to everyone, and Amy had every reason to boast, "that Lord Kingsford paid her more attention than any other girl in the county." Certainly, it was not of a very demonstrative nature; it merely consisted in sitting beside her at dances, walking with her from church—and this not very often—but for a man like Lord Kingsford, everyone declared that "it meant a great deal."

Amy's impressionable little heart was touched—very much touched, indeed—for about the tenth time, for she had a great capacity for falling in and out of love!

Now, she assured herself, and Rosamond too, that she was really, really in love at last, and that if Lord Kingsford did not care for her she would die of a broken heart.

She was a girl whose emotions were entirely on the surface, and who delighted in analysing her feelings for her own satisfaction and for the benefit of her friend.

When she came to talk to her confidante at night over their hair brushing operations—when they made long sessions in each other's rooms—she would say nearly every time the same thing.

"Tell me, Rosie, you who have had so much experience, do you think he cares for me? Do—do tell me what you think, and I will abide by it."

You see Miss Amy had no reticence and no shyness.

"How can I answer such a question?" was the invariable answer. "He certainly seems to like talking to you, and that is a good sign," smiling; "and if he really does mean anything, and I hope he does for your sake"—this was really, sincerely said, and, considering all things, unanimous—"you will be a very lucky girl!"

"I shall be Lady Kingsford!" returned Amy, exultantly, striking her shoes on the fender, and thinking with a quick accession of colour how delicious it would be to take the precedence of all the ladies in the neighbourhood.

"I wonder what his first wife was like!" she added, meditatively; "one cannot help feeling an interest in her, poor thing. She must have been quite young. I wonder how long she has been dead!"

"I'm sure I don't know," returned Rosamond, indifferently. "Has he never spoken of her to you during all your interesting *été-à-été*?"

"Never. Indeed, I remark he pointedly avoids the subject. I've thrown out two or three delicate little feelers in that direction, but they have all been withered up. He can be very reserved if he chooses, and is not prone to discuss his own affairs. Still I think he might say something about her—who she was—where she died, for we know absolutely nothing about her beyond that she was the child's mother," in an aggrieved tone of voice.

"Well," consolingly, "you know a man does not usually make love to his second wife by talking of the first," said Rosamond, looking at her friend with a smile; "and, by-the-bye, what does he generally talk to you about?"

"Oh! the weather."

"The weather!" in a voice of profound amazement.

"Yes, there's a good deal of that, and Tommy, and Tommy's pony, and now I come to think of it—as if struck by a sudden bright idea—"he talks a good deal about you!"

"About me!" echoed Rosamond, prising, brush in hand, "What do you mean? You are joking."

"I mean"—imperatively—"that he generally—yes," nodding her head with her eyes fixed meditatively on the fire, "yes, nearly always leads the subject round to you, and then leaves me to talk about you, just dropping a word or two to keep me going. You know he is not much of a talker himself, and I am," laughing.

"I wonder what possible interest he can find in talking about me!" says Rosamond, speculatively. "I think you must be romancing, my good girl!"

For this statement by no means tallied with her own experiences. Gladly as she would have been friends with him, the attraction, as before stated, was not mutual. He avoided her whom all men coveted. He was the exception that proved the rule, and she felt that this avoidance was not accidental, not imaginary, but quite real.

He evidently disliked her, but why? And why, again, did she repeatedly catch his eyes following her or fixed on her, and instantly withdrawn, as she danced, or sang, or sat at her work, or in her seat in church. "She reminded him of his wife, that was it. Her first surmise had been the correct one," she said to herself, as lifting up the poker she began to stir the fire.

"Has he ever said anything to you, Amy?" she asked, as she hammered the coals.

Amy, she hoped, had a happy future beginning to open for her. What a contrast to her own dark past—a past into which she shuddered to look; and if her help, her sympathy, her friendship, and her money could avail Amy, they were here to command most abundantly.

"N—o," returned that young lady, reluctantly. "He has never said anything that you might not post up in the market-place, that's the worst of it. But he is so handsome and looks so nice. I think he looks as if he liked me, and once he said that Amy was a very pretty name."

"He did not ask if he might call you by it, did he?" questioned her friend, who was still harrying the unfortunate fire with very successful results.

"No," with a profound sigh; "I only wish he

had, I should have been only too happy to say 'yes.'"

"What is his name—his Christian name," inquired Rosamond, abstractedly.

"Oh!"—rapturously—"such a pretty one, such a charming name, it just fits him. You must guess it. Let me see how clever you can be!"

"My dear child, what nonsense. How could I possibly guess his name unless I wanted to sit up all night, which I don't. What is it?"

"Well, since you won't guess I suppose I must tell you," said Amy, with a certain air of affectionate patronage, and as if conferring a favour of no small value. "His name is Allan."

Clang down fell the poker on the fender, making noise enough to wake the dead.

"Oh, Rosie! Do take care," she exclaimed, pettishly. "You nearly took my toes off, and will have Wheeler rushing in to know what all the noise is about."

Rosie's hair fell over her face as she stooped in allience to pick up the offending fire iron, and she seemed rather a long time in finding it, and her face, instead of being red when she lifted it and tossed her hair back over her shoulders, was simply ashen-white, and her lips were livid.

"Isn't it a lovely name!" said Amy, ecstatically. "But goodness gracious!" gazing at her friend in astonishment, "What's the matter? You have not hurt yourself with the poker, have you?"

"No. How could I?" returned the other, in a strange, forced, would-be cheerful voice.

How could the world be so small, that this neighbour, this rich, reserved young lord possessed not only her betrayer's eyes—a resemblance to him at times that made her the sport of agonising and conflicting emotions—but his name as well!

"It's not a common name, is it?" demanded Amy. "That's the beauty of it. You never heard it before, did you?"

"Yes, I have heard it before," returned Rosamond's white lips, almost mechanically. "It's a name—with a great gasp—"that I never wish to hear again. It is a name that I hate," fiercely rising as she spoke, and pushing back her chair. She then took a candle off the dressing-table; and without another word, without even the customary good-night kiss, she trailed out of the room in her long, white dressing-gown, leaving Amy sitting at the fire with her hands on her knees, her mouth half-open, gazing stupidly at the now shut door.

"What can there be in the name that makes her look like that?" she asked herself, anxiously. "I never saw her so queer before. Louisa Brand hinted to me that she was a girl with a past, and I suppose a man of the name of Allan is mixed up in it. Well, any way, it's no affair of mine," murmured this unusually prudent young lady; "my own love affairs take up as much mind as I've got." But now she understood why Rosamond seemed so hard, so unsympathetic about some things, why she repulsed every eligible suitor, and why she was called the ice queen. "She looks like a girl who would take a love affair to heart, and never get over it," concluded Amy to herself.

She was very fond of Rosamond, and had every reason to be so; and, although she opened her mind so freely and so fully herself, she was aware that her friend's past was a sealed book to her—at any rate, any past that would throw light upon the magic name of "Allan."

Of course she knew of her girlhood at Drydd, of her years on the continent, of her wonderful social successes, of her large fortune, of her intense dislike to Teddy Brand, and, in but one degree milder, of Teddy's father, of the cool, unusual relations between her mother and herself. But she felt instinctively that there was yet a great deal in the background which she did not know, and probably would remain in ignorance of as long as she and Rosamond lived.

To follow Rosamond now, and leave Amy to her foolish dreams of rank and happiness, and not by any means the first of the kind that have taken hold upon her impressionable imagination,

we find Rosamond pacing her room as she used to walk in moments—nay, in hours—of frenzy, in bygone days.

"Could he, oh! would he," she asked herself, in a choked whisper, "be a cousin, or some near relation of that other Allan, her perfidious lover, who had disappeared from her life five years ago? But Allan had no grand relations, he had never mentioned the name of 'Kingsford'; but then he had probably assumed a false name himself. The coincidence was extraordinary; the likeness, the Christian name, they might easily be cousins. This Lord Kingsford was ten years older than Allan (she sojourn on the island had aged him greatly, as has been pointed out before); but surely he would have heard of him, and somehow she would sound him in the most delicate, distant, and subtle manner, and without loss of time too. Supposing the Allan who had deserted her were to reappear and claim her now she was an heiress! But it was not likely; five years was a long time. He was just a handsome, worthless, young scamp, who had plucked the Rose of Drydd, and thrown it away to wither or die."

The next day, as the two girls were snipping off dead roses in the garden, with chamois leather gloves on their hands, and shady hats on their heads, Amy, whose curiosity was a much more robust article than she imagined, suddenly straightened herself, flung a mass of dead roses into her basket, and with gaping scissors 'twixt finger and thumb, said, in a most matter-of-fact way,—

"I wonder, Rosamond, what that lover of yours was like!"

"My lover!" with a terrible start. "You must be mad!" rejoined her companion, from the other side of the rose tree. "What put it into your head that I ever had a lover? You are crazy about lovers!"

"I'm sure you had!" impressively, "because of last night; and I think, when I tell you everything," speaking in an aggrieved tone of voice, "you might tell me a little about him!"

"What has put this ridiculous idea into your head?" returned Rosamond, sheltering herself behind her namesake's. "Are not your own experiences more than enough for you?" with a would-be sprightly air.

"Do you want me to understand, Rosie, or to believe that (coming round the bush) a pretty girl like you has never been in love, or never had a lover? Of course you're had dozens, but it has been a one-sided affair! I mean, was there not one of them all—was there not once some one you really cared about? Come, now, tell the truth. Oh, Lord Kingsford, what a start you gave me! I'd no idea you were behind me," turning round with flushed cheeks and a rather constrained laugh. "What a mercy it was," she said to herself, "that she had not been talking about him, for he must have heard every word she said the last two minutes."

"I'm just in time to hear you cross-examine Miss Dane," he said, with a smile. "I have been an unintentional eavesdropper," speaking with much more animation than usual.

"Yes, and she has not given me an answer yet," returned Amy, playfully. "As you have happened to hear so much you may as well hear that too."

"I'm not quite sure that I understood the question," he returned, glancing from one girl to the other; from the smiling, saucy Amy to the pale but singularly beautiful Miss Dane, who, with averted eyes and unusually pale face, was still keeping on nipping off roses; but had anyone been watching her trembling hands they would have noticed that, like Death the Reaper, she spared nothing.

She cut off buds, half-blown and full-blown roses; aye, and leaves indiscriminately, and gathered them mechanically into her basket.

Amy had no reticence, and was not particularly refined either, so she gleefully said,—

"I was asking Rosamond if she had been in love. Of course you know that heaps of people have been in love with her!" laughing exult-



WITHOUT A PARTING LOOK OR SIGN TO LORD KINGSFORD, ROSAMOND TURNED DOWN A SHADY WALK.

tantly; "but the question is, has she ever cared for anyone?"

"You can scarcely expect her to tell you that," said Lord Kingsford, firmly, glancing quickly over at Rosamond, who now looked paler than the white rose in her hand, and who had not opened her lips yet.

"No," she exclaimed, speaking at last in a low, hurried tone; "if I had anything to tell I should certainly keep it to myself instead of blazoning it out in the open air to you and Lord Kingsford, and probably three or four of the gardeners; and at any time and place it is not a subject for joking."

"But I was not joking," returned Amy, pettishly.

"Then so much the worse," very shortly. "Here, if you like I'll carry in your basket, as I can't stand the sun any longer," reaching over and possessing herself of Amy's share of dead leaves; and thus, with a burden of roses on either arm, and without a parting look or sign to Lord Kingsford, Rosamond turned down a shady, gravelled walk, and left Amy and the new arrival alone.

"I can't think what's the matter with her today," said Amy, placidly. "Girls generally don't mind talking of their love affairs with one another. If you had not come up I am sure I'd have heard who he was."

"I doubt it," returned her companion, so decidedly and promptly that she started and looked at him amazed; but he was looking just as usual, merely tracing something in the gravel with his cane.

"She is such an odd girl," pursued Amy, confidentially. "Although I tell her everything," spreading out her chamade leather hands, "and she is an awfully nice confidante, and takes an interest, a real interest, in everything, she never returns the compliment, and only speaks of things in a general way. Of course I've heard all about her life at Drydd."

"Indeed," acquiesced her companion, ironi-

cally, but the irony was completely thrown away in the present case.

"And about her going abroad, and all that? I've got an idea into my mind," impressively.

"And what is that?" said Lord Kingsford, scrutinizing her with cool intensity.

"That she has had some terrible love affair that has spoiled her life, and that has hardened her heart against all men for ever."

"And why should you fancy this?" again tracing in the gravel.

"Oh, for many reasons. She takes no real interest in any man, she never has a good word for love or lovers! I got a clue to the matter last night, quite by chance," confidentially.

"A clue!" he exclaimed, with a slight start.

"Yes, I'm sure I know the man's Christian name. It was, funny enough, the same as yours—Allan. Yes," she chattered on, unconscious of her companion's visible agitation, "I happened to mention your name quite casually"—oh, fie! Amy, what a fib!—"and she dropped the poker from her hand with such a crash, and turned so very, very white, I thought she was going to faint."

"Yes. And you think you have a clue?"

"I'm sure of it," decisively. "I asked her if she had ever known anyone of that name?"

"Yes," with a kind of restrained eagerness in his tone; "and what did she say?"

"Oh, she said she had known one Allan once, and that she hated him, and she said it so viciously you would be quite surprised!" added Amy in a rather awestruck voice. "He must have treated her badly; what do you say?" picking off a rose as she spoke, and looking at him with a coquettish glance from under her eyelashes.

"I suppose she thinks so, at any rate," acquiesced Lord Kingsford, in a rather abstracted tone, "and that is much the same."

"Wasn't it funny his having the same name as yours?" she asked, vivaciously.

"Very funny, as you say," rather drily.

"I wonder where he is, and who he was!" she added, impulsively. "I wish I knew his other name, don't you? I love mysteries."

"No, I cannot say that I share your anxiety," responded her companion, rather coolly. "Why should we attempt to thrust ourselves into Miss Dane's private affairs?" Then relenting, as he met Amy's startled and imploring eyes, he added, "Well, never mind, Miss Glen; you may be sure that it's a long lane that has no turning, and if you will only wait patiently, you'll find out this fellow's other name some day. And now, suppose you show me the model beehives you were talking about the last time I saw you! Tommy is so fond of honey that I must set up an apiary; for nothing else will stand his consumption of that article."

And even Amy could take his broad hint that he wished to turn the conversation—"but why?"

(To be continued.)

In some of the Eastern countries, notably Arabia and Persia, a manna answering closely to that mentioned in the Scriptures is still naturally produced in considerable quantity. It comes from the tender branches of the tamerisk, and is known to the Persians by the name of "tamerisk honey." It consists of tear-like drops which exude in consequence of the puncture of an insect, during the months of June and July. In the cool of the morning it is found solidified, and the congealed tears may be shaken from the limbs. That, in fact, is one of the methods of gathering manna. Herodotus alludes to the same nutritious product, so that there is no doubt it has been known in these regions from the earliest ages. It is easy to see how it might be produced in wonderful quantities without any special manifestations of the supernatural. It is a sweetish substance, pleasant to the taste, and highly nutritive.



DR. BERTRAM SUDDENLY STOOD BEFORE THEM.

TRAGEDY AT ROSE COTTAGE.

CHAPTER III.

Few of us have reached twenty without knowing what it means to have a presentiment of trouble; a strange feeling that some calamity is at hand. We cannot describe or explain this sensation; it attacks us sometimes when all things are going well with us, and we have just been in better spirits than usual.

The cleverest among us cannot really diagnose a presentiment; superstitious people tell us it is a warning. They may or may not be right, but anyway we must all, young and old, confess that few things are more painfully depressing than a presentiment of trouble.

Phillis Marston had left home in very good spirits; any little annoyance she might have felt at Dick's holiday plans had been dispelled by the unselfish thought that his absence would make Arline all the happier.

Phil was really "getting on" in a modest fashion, and earned enough for it to be possible to keep her sister in Mayfield-road for a good many weeks longer without feeling the actual pinch of poverty.

It was her last day of teaching before the holidays, and perhaps this made her pupils more interesting than usual. Anyway, Phillis had rarely had a more satisfactory round, and she set out for home in the best possible spirits.

And then, as she waited for the tramway, the sky, her own sky that is, clouded over. She knew nothing of the reason, only a strange gray shadow of fear pulled suddenly at her heart's strings. It was as though in the few minutes she stood waiting, an awful certainty seized her that she should find trouble at home.

Perhaps Mrs. Tudor or one of the girls would have called, and the dormant discord between them and Arline had been fanned into an active quarrel. Perhaps some accident had befallen

Dick. She did not know what she feared, only she felt ill news awaited her.

She was a little later than she should have been, and she expected a rebuke from Arline, but though the tea-things stood ready on the table, her sister was not in the little parlour. Phil went to take off her things, expecting to find Arline in her bedroom, but she was not there; the room looked unwontedly tidy. There was no pretty display of ribbons and lace on the dressing-table; no carelessly tossed off outdoor gear reposed on the bed.

Arline must be out; and yet how she hated walking about alone; besides, it was past tea-time. Thoroughly perplexed Phillis went back to the parlour. Her landlady stood there waiting for her to put the tea in the pot.

"Your sister went off quite comfortably, Miss Marston," said the good woman, civilly, "my little boy fetched a cab, so she had no bother about her bag, and she left this note, Miss, she said it was something she had forgotten to tell you in the morning."

Phillis Marston commanded herself by an effort; she longed to cry out, to scream, to do anything to relieve the tension of her overwrought nerves, but she knew that for Arline's own sake no one must suspect that her departure was a complete surprise to her sister, so with fingers that trembled the poor girl measured out the tea, and not till the door had closed on Mrs. White did she open Arline's letter.

It was very short and very vague. It filled Phil's heart with alarm, and yet she felt all the time that Arline had been in good spirits when she wrote it.

"MY DEAR OLD PHIL,—

"Don't be horrified when you come home and find me gone. I should like to tell you everything, only I can't, lest you should confide it to your future relations, and you know how they hate me.

"Phil, I can never be a governess again, and as (as your mother-in-law elect reminded me

yesterday) it is not fair that I should be a burden on you, I have gone to the one person in the world whose right it is to take care of me. To-morrow I will write and tell you everything, but I mustn't until I have his leave.

"Perhaps we shall come together to see you before you go to the sea. He is older and handsomer than your Dick, and he has loved me ever since we first met. Dear old Phil, you must try and like my husband for my sake. I will write soon, and if we do not come to see you might send me my clothes. I am only taking just a handbag with me.—Always, darling, your troublesome little sister,

"ARLINE."

Phil sat back in her chair with a strange feeling that everything in the room was turning round. Even now with the letter in her hand she could not quite believe its contents. Arline had left her; the girl she loved so fondly, for whose sake she would have made any sacrifice, had deceived her all along.

At the time when Phillis was urging Arline to answer advertisements, and trying hard to find her a situation, she must have known that she had a husband, and most likely it was her meetings with him which had caused Mrs. Carleton to dismiss her so summarily.

Phil put one hand to her aching head and tried hard to think. She was powerless. She had not the faintest idea where Arline had gone. She could do nothing, absolutely nothing but wait for her sister's promised letter.

"Lor, Miss, you do look bad," said Mrs. White, kindly, when she brought back the teapot. "You've been over-doing it this hot weather. It's a pity Miss Arline's not here to nurse you."

"I am not ill enough to want nursing," said Phil, with a brave little attempt at a smile, "but I am very tired, and I feel thankful there are no more lessons to give for seven whole weeks. I mean to have an idle evening Mrs. White, and rest on the sofa."

"It's the best thing you can do, Miss," said the landlady, "for you seem quite fagged out."

But after all Phillis was not to spend a lonely evening. About half an hour after the tea tray had departed Mr. Tudor came in.

Phil's lover was—it must be confessed—rather a common-place young man, and it was a distinct cause of wonder to some of her friends how she could have chosen him. Dick was twenty-five, not clever or brilliant, but with average ability, and a profound respect for his own opinion, also an intense belief in his mother and sisters. He was very fond of Phillis, but he thought privately it was very disinterested of him to marry a governess without a penny of her own.

For Arline he had an indifference which almost amounted to dislike, while he would never have consented to her sharing his home, even in the holidays.

His visit to-night was not exactly on a lover's errand. He had come to "speak seriously" to Phillis. His mother's account of her yesterday's call had much impressed him. It seemed clear to Dick that if no one came to the rescue his betrothed's sister would be quartered on her for life, and so he had come to assert his right as Phil's adviser and future lord.

He was fat and rather undersized, which tended to make him look insignificant. He was painfully conscious of his lack of inches, and most tenacious of any reference to the advantages of height.

Phil, leaning back on the old sofa, looked tired and sad, a picture which surely should have touched her lover's heart; but it only irritated Dick. What right had she to look tired when he came to see her! She ought to brighten up and be at her best then.

She welcomed him with a smile. It is wonderful to me how we women can smile when our hearts are aching.

"Oh, Dick I have you come to say good-bye! I hope you will have a nice trip. The weather seems promising."

"I have not come to talk about the weather," returned Dick, in an aggrieved tone, "and I want to see you alone."

"Well. You are not likely to see any one else. Arline is away on a visit."

"I am glad to hear it—very glad," he said, with exactly his mother's gesture, "it was about her that I came to-night."

"Then I can guess the rest," said Phil, her usual sweet temper deserting her. "You think Arline was rude to Mrs. Tudor yesterday, but you need not say any more. I don't think it is nice of you to complain to me about my sister, and your mother can be very provoking at times. I dare say she goaded Arline into saying what she did."

Phil could not help the outburst. She was feeling miserable and disheartened. Dick was the one creature in the world who should have comforted her, and he had come to complain of Arline.

"Don't excite yourself," said Mr. Tudor, composedly, "I only want to speak quietly, there's no need to get into a temper."

Phil sat bolt upright, and looked him full in the face.

"I am not in a temper," she said, gravely; "but I feel ill and worn out. This is the longest term in the year, and it has tried me a good deal."

"Of course it has," said her lover. "You have had to support your sister for more than half of it."

"That is not your business."

"It is my business. If you overtask your strength and become broken down and hysterical, what chance of happiness shall I have in the future. You ought to consider me, and take proper care of yourself."

"If you have only come here to reproach me, Dick, I think you had better go."

"I shall not stay long, but I want you to understand the position; I do not think your sister a desirable companion for my future wife."

"How dare you!" came from Phil; she was as angry now as girl could be. "How dare you

say such a thing of Arline when you have known her from a child!"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Since your aunt's death her conduct has never been satisfactory; think of all the situations she tried before she went to Mrs. Carleton's!"

"She stayed there two years."

"And was dismissed in disgrace."

"She was not," cried Phil, eagerly—but the next moment she turned pale as death. After all he might be right, Arline had never told her sister why she left Mrs. Carleton.

"It is clear there was something unsatisfactory about the affair," said Dick, sententiously; "but the future is what I look at; Arline makes not the least attempt to keep herself; you can't keep her now without ruining your health, and later—when we are married—"

"You need not speak of that—we shall not be married for ages."

"I don't know about that."

"What do you mean?"

And Dick went on in his ponderous fashion to say that he had been offered a better post with a higher salary by his present employers if he would consent to go out to a branch house they had in South Africa.

"My mother was very much against the idea at first, but she has given in now. I have saved a little money, and as my passage will be paid by the firm, it would do for yours. There is nothing to keep us in England; out there we should have a furnished house and two hundred a year, quite enough to begin on in a quiet way."

But Phillis answered nothing; she seemed as one suddenly turned to stone.

"I am to take my holiday as arranged, and give my answer to the firm when I return. We should sail the end of September, so as to arrive before the worst of the summer."

And then Phil found her voice.

"I couldn't do it, Dick; I could not possibly leave England at a moment's notice."

"It's not a moment's notice; there would be six weeks and more for preparations."

"Dick," and the girl lifted her sweet eyes to his, "you know quite well that Arline is all I have in the world, how can you ask me to leave her?"

"I should have thought I stood before your sister," he said, angrily; "if not it is a sorry prospect for my future."

"Dick," she repeated, "how long have we been engaged?"

"Surely you know, just on two years, but we have been lovers all our lives."

"We were friends and play-fellows," she corrected, quickly, "and when you asked me to be your wife I believed that I loved you well enough to wish to spend my life with you—but that was two years ago, and you are changed."

"We were all right till Arline came between us."

She shook her head.

"At first we were happy, Dick, but lately (and long before Arline left Mrs. Carleton's) you have seemed dissatisfied; you have not liked to feel that I worked for my bread. I think sometimes you have been ashamed of me. It is not your doing, Dick; perpetual dropping wears out a stone, and your mother and sisters have done their best to make you think I was 'not good enough' for you."

"Phil, you are hard on me," he protested, "I love you dearly."

"But you love yourself better," she answered. "Dick, I am not a child; do you think I don't know you have had this African scheme under consideration for months! You say your mother 'objected at first.' Why that proves it. I will tell you what I believe, and you shall contradict me if I am wrong. You have only agreed to go because you felt the distance would part me irrevocably from Arline."

"I think the separation would be a good thing," he answered. "She must depend on herself if you are in Africa."

"And this is love," said Phil, bitterly. "You think you love me, and yet you would part me from Arline."

Dick was offended.

"I won't play second fiddle to anyone," he

said, crossly. "If you will marry me next month I shall do my utmost to make you happy; if you let me go out to Africa alone, why, perhaps, when you are ready to marry me you won't find it quite so easy to whistle me back again."

But he had gone too far, Phil had been busy with the third finger of her left hand, and now she took off her ring, a poor little turquoise affair, and gave it back to Dick.

"All is over between us," she said, simply. "After to-night I could never quite believe in your love for me. I want a husband who will treat me as a friend and companion, not as a piece of property. I will send you back your letters and presents to-morrow. Please burn mine."

"Phillis!"

"You can give what version of this you like to your family and friends. If you go to Africa that will be a sufficient reason to outsiders. Anyway, do what you please, you may be sure I shall not contradict you."

"And you can jilt me after all these years!"

"I am not jilting you. You are not the man I loved and who loved me; you are a stranger, consumed with the idea of his own importance and longing to be rich."

"And you actually sacrifice me to your sister?"

"I deny that I am sacrificing you. I could not leave Arline at such a short notice; but if she were not in existence I should equally break off my engagement. If you can be so cruel and indifferent now, what would you be as a husband?"

"And you are quite sure?"

"I am positive that you are free. I will try not to judge you too harshly. Perhaps we both made a mistake. You are not the man I loved; perhaps I am not the girl you chose. It is a good thing we found out our mistake in time."

And there was nothing for it but for Dick to go. He put the poor little ring in his pocket and went out.

He had an odd feeling as he walked home that he had not got the best of it in the affair, and that, in spite of all his mother had said, Phillis Marston was a girl worth winning.

But arrived at home his vanity recovered itself.

His mother and sisters were sitting up for him and quite ready to assert that he had taken the only course possible, and Phillis had behaved abominably.

"She is sure to be an old maid," said Mrs. Tudor, speaking as though that fate were an intense calamity; "she will be sorry all her days, my boy, that she let you slip through her fingers."

"And now you need not go to Africa," said one of the girls. But Dick differed.

After what had passed he did not want to remain within a few minutes' walk of Mayfield-road.

He would certify to the firm his acceptance of their offer, and his mother had better begin to see about his outfit at once.

Mrs. Tudor was not quite satisfied with the turn of events. She wanted the engagement broken off, but she hated the thought of losing her son. In Africa their brother would be of very little use to her girls.

The manoeuvring mother had over-reached herself; she had parted her son from the girl he loved, but she had not managed to keep him at her side.

And Phillis Marston cried herself to sleep that night, but her tears were for the dear old friend of her childhood not for the man who had been her lover.

CHAPTER IV.

NEVER had there been such a commotion before. Hillington could talk of nothing else. The excitement almost reached a frenzy, and the subject was freely discussed even at the Castle.

Here was a beautiful young stranger arrived alone and unprotected in their town, and in less than twenty-four hours she was found dead,

having either taken her own life or been cruelly murdered.

"I don't believe she killed herself," said Meta Rivers to her special friend Ida Fane; "she had such a sweet face, and she did not look as if she could have done such a thing."

"And mother says your old nurse declared she seemed in the best of spirits," commented Lady Ida Fane; "but then, Meta, who could have killed her; she was quite a stranger here, she couldn't have had an enemy in the place!"

The inquest was opened on the Saturday and the result was as perplexing as it could be. First of all Dr. Gibson proved conclusively that the cause of death was from prussic acid, but how the said poison was administered seemed wrapped in mystery. Death must have been instantaneous, and so it followed that, if it was a case of suicide, the bottle which had held the poison, or the glass from which it had been swallowed, must be in the room—the victim would not have been able to remove them.

But not a trace of anything which had been used for poison could be discovered, though the most untiring search was made; and the doctor said frankly this fact, to his mind, made it clear that it was a case of murder, not suicide.

Poor Mrs. Hobbs, full of real grief for the poor young lodger, and feeling ashamed of the evil repute which must creep over her house, was examined at some length, but her testimony never once varied.

She was at the back of the cottage all the morning, and for more than two hours she was as incapable of hearing what took place in her parlour as if she had been miles away. Mrs. Ashlyn was a nice pleasant spoken young lady, and had come to Hillington to meet a friend. That was all she knew.

From other sources it was proved that the deceased was quite a stranger to the town; that she had inquired at the post-office for a "Mr. Ashlyn's" address, and had been told no person of the name lived in Hillington.

Mrs. Hobbs—recalled for the purpose—said that Mrs. Ashlyn wrote a letter and posted it with her own hand the evening of her arrival. She saw the letter, but upside down, so that it was impossible to read the address. Mrs. Ashlyn paid for the rooms and her board for a week.

Thus far nothing had been mentioned but what every one knew before, it seemed an impenetrable mystery when, pushing his way into the crowded room, came the kindly-faced, broad-shouldered curate of Hillington. No one could even guess what he knew about the tragedy, but at his own wish he was sworn.

"I wish I could have been here earlier," he said; "but I went home by the ten-thirty train yesterday morning, and knew absolutely nothing of the tragedy until my father read out the paragraph in the local paper at breakfast to-day."

Every one knew that the Rev. Paul Hardy was the younger son of a baronet, whose country seat was ten miles from Hillington, and quite half of those present were aware the curate had gone home on a flying visit the day before; but what he could know of Mrs. Ashlyn's death no one guessed.

His story was very short, but full of interest. It appeared that his mother had begged him to bring her a parcel of valuable lace which Mrs. Hobbs had been mending for her, but that he cut the time so fine for his walk to the station, that he had only two minutes to spare when he reached Rose Cottage. Finding his knock disregarded, he looked in at the parlour window hoping to attract Mrs. Hobbs's attention. He saw two people there, both strangers to himself, one was a young and very pretty woman, the other, a man with a grey beard.

"An old man," asked one of the jury, who was promptly silenced.

"I did not say an old man," replied the curate, "he had a grey beard; but otherwise his face looked young. He was sitting on the sofa beside the lady, and his arm was round her waist. I thought," and the Rev. Paul coloured, "that Mrs. Hobbs had let her rooms to a couple on their honeymoon. There was no time for me to wait if I wanted to catch my train, so I went off without troubling any further about the lace, and

I never thought any more about the people I had seen until my father read out the news of the tragedy. The paper said the inquest opened at ten, and I started for Hillington at once, thinking my testimony, meagre as it is, might be of use."

"Were they quarrelling?" he was asked.

"Did the man seem angry?"

The curate shook his head.

"Remember I had but the one glance at them. My first idea was Mrs. Hobbs had let her rooms to a honeymoon couple."

"Should you know the man again?"

Paul hesitated.

"Speak up, sir."

"I hardly know what to say. I should know him if he were got up as he was yesterday, but ever since I heard of Mrs. Ashlyn's death, I have believed the man I saw was disguised."

"What makes you think so?"

"Several trifles. The beard was so long it must have created a great deal of notice, and I am quite sure no one in the town has such a beard, and though both beard and hair were grey, it was a young face with a smooth skin, and very brilliant eyes."

The inquest was adjourned, and it was understood that the police would make every effort to trace the man described by the curate, for the impression gaining ground was that it was no case of suicide, but that the poor young stranger had been brutally and cruelly murdered.

Paul Hardy was carried off by the Earl to lunch at the Castle, where the ladies were much interested in his story.

Meta Rivers, who was spending the day with her friends, looked thankful as she listened to it.

"I can't explain it to you, Mr. Hardy, but I took a wonderful fancy to Mrs. Ashlyn; you know I showed her the way to Rose Cottage, and I—I liked her; I couldn't bear to think she killed herself."

"Did she strike you as happy?"

Meta shook her head.

"No. I think she had the saddest face I ever saw. I believe that she had come here to find her husband. I think Ashlyn was an assumed name, and that she did not know his real one."

Lunch was over now, and most of the young people were playing tennis, but Meta and Paul paced up and down the long shrubbery, quite engrossed with their conversation.

"Don't say that," exclaimed Paul, "don't you see that would fix the crime on someone in this neighbourhood; it would be awful to feel we had a murderer in our midst."

"When will she be buried?" asked Meta.

"On Tuesday. The Earl is going to provide all the expenses; he says that if any of her own people come to seek her later on they shall not have the pain of finding her in a pauper's grave."

Meta's eyes filled with tears.

"How good of him. I was wishing so that I could do something to save her from that."

"He will see to it—your poor old nurse is in a dreadful state of mind. She seems to think no one will ever take her rooms again."

"And it was I who took Mrs. Ashlyn to her. I am so sorry."

"Mrs. Hobbs will get over it," said Paul cheerfully, "my mother must tear more holes in her lace to provide the old lady with extra work. Shall I tell you whom I pity most, Miss Rivers—that poor girl's relations. Don't you see, if she came to Hillington to meet her husband unknown to them, it may be weeks and months before they hear of her fate."

Meta shuddered.

"And she was so young; she looked almost a child."

Paul did not tell her that the medical testimony showed there had been the strongest possible reason for Mrs. Ashlyn wishing to see her husband. If she had been living at home under her maiden name since her marriage, she could not have continued to do so much longer; it was a double murder which had been committed, and the man with the grey beard had killed not only the poor girl herself, but her unborn child.

Meta never forgot the day of the stranger's funeral; it was bright and sunny, and it seemed that all Hillington had gathered in the churchyard.

The country people had not been wanting in marks of kindness to the dead. The plain oak coffin provided by the Earl's orders was literally covered with wreaths of flowers, many of them from cottage gardens; while the conservatories of the Castle and the Hall had contributed their share of rarer blossoms. It was as though the youth and beauty of the dead girl had touched all hearts, and filled them with sorrow for her untimely fate.

Mrs. Austin, the postmistress, expressed the sentiments of a good many of her neighbours when she said,—

"And I should just like to have the handling of the man who killed her. Grey-bearded indeed, I don't believe a fig of that; he may have made himself up to look like an old man, but there was only one person who had an interest in that poor young creature's death—her own husband. He'd got tired of her, and she stood in his way, so he lured her here and made an end of her."

But though public opinion was dead against "the man with the grey beard," and everyone believed him to be the murderer, very few thought he was also the mysterious Mr. Ashlyn.

"You see," said Paul Hardy, for whom the subject possessed a strange fascination as he discussed it with the Earl, "if that man killed her how did he know she had come to Hillington. She wrote a letter the night before her death, but it could not have been to her husband, since from her inquiries at the post-office it is plain she did not know where he was."

The Earl shook his head.

"If you want my opinion, Hardy—how Mrs. Ashlyn met her death will remain one of the undiscovered mysteries of our time. I wish it had not happened here. It has cast a gloom over the whole place."

"If I were free to take up the quest, I should like to track that man and bring him to justice," returned the curate. "Oh, don't look so horrified, Lord Hillington. Of course I know it can't be done. My profession would not allow of my bringing even a just vengeance on an offender. But all the same I should enjoy the task."

But the Earl shook his head solemnly.

"I hope no one will stir in the matter," he said, very gravely; "the ball once set rolling there is no telling where it would stop. No efforts of ours can bring that poor girl back to life, and in seeking to avenge her death we might bring a terrible burden of disgrace upon some innocent people."

Paul looked amazed.

"What in the world do you mean, my lord?" he asked, anxiously. "You can't possibly have your suspicions on any one in particular."

Lord Hillington shuddered.

"Heaven forbid—but if we are to believe the man with the grey beard was disguised, and that he was really young, we must admit that he lived here, since no one saw him arrive or depart. Can't you see, Hardy, that this throws a terrible doubt upon every family with a grown-up son?"

"Not upon yours," said Paul, heartily. "No human creature could suspect Lord Fane of murder."

The father seemed well pleased at the prompt defence of his boy.

"Fane is no better than his fellows, but I feel sure of him in this matter, only there are so few young men of means about here who could have contracted a secret marriage, that I feel if the matter were sifted a grave suspicion must fall on those few."

"Have they examined Mrs. Ashlyn's things?" asked the curate; "surely there must be some clue to her home and friends; once find those and the rest will be easy."

The Earl shook his head.

"It is plain she did not intend to stay long in Hillington, for she brought only the most necessary of toilet articles and a change of clothes. She wore no jewellery of any description except her wedding ring, and her writing materials were of the commonest kind. As to her clothes, they

are just what any young lady of moderate means might wear. The under-linen is all marked by hand with the letter A, the initial of her surname."

"And there is no clue to her friends?"

"None. Inquiries at the station show that she gave up a ticket from Liverpool-street. Of course the newspapers have reported the case, and it is just possible that the account may meet the eye of her friends. When people have lost a sister or daughter they generally read everything in the newspapers that could throw light on her fate."

But when the adjourned inquest took place, very little further light was thrown on the mystery. Mr. Hardy's statement was so far substantiated that two people came forward separately to say they had seen a man answering to his description of the stranger he had seen in Mrs. Hobbs' parlour.

Both witnesses were independent of each other and perfectly trustworthy; one was a carpenter going to a job at a village three miles off. According to him a stranger stopped him and asked him the way to Rose Cottage, the gentleman was old, and spoke with a strong foreign accent. The time of the meeting was ten o'clock, which seemed to say the stranger had gone straight on to his victim.

The other witness, a woman who cleaned the church, had seen a man with a grey beard take short cut across the churchyard which led away from Hillington into the open country. The clock struck eleven as he passed, which fixed the time of the murder at about half-past ten, or almost directly after Mr. Hardy had left the cottage.

The London papers reported the case fully, and several people who had lost relations mysteriously wrote or came to Hillington only to meet with failure, for when brought to the point the description of their missing one did not coincide with that of Mrs. Ashlyn.

"I call it awful," Meta Rivers said to Lord Fane when he walked home with her one evening after she had been playing tennis with his sisters, "that anyone could be done to death in broad daylight in their own sitting-room: it is enough to make one nervous."

Fane shook his head; he was a clever thoughtful young fellow of six-and-twenty.

"Depend upon it, Meta, we have not heard the last of this affair; sooner or later the dead girl's friends will come to Hillington, and the missing clue will be found."

"Did you know that Mr. Careton has offered a reward for the apprehension of the man with the grey beard?"

"No; has he? I wanted my father to do so, but he held back for some scruple. How proud the family at the Hall will be to have taken the initiative!"

"One hundred pounds," said Meta, dreamily; "it seems a lot of money."

"He can well afford it," replied Fane, "he gets richer every year."

"I wish I was rich," said Meta, impulsively, then checking herself at the amazed look on Lord Fane's face, "or else that I was so poor no one minded what I did."

"Why, Meta," asked the young man, affectionately, "what a mad sort of wish! Fortunately it can't be granted. A great many people will always 'care' what you do."

"That's the worst of it."

The pretty eyes had filled with tears. It dawned on Lord Fane suddenly that she was in trouble; that some other sorrow than her mother's temper and strange lack of affection must be weighing on her.

"What's the matter, Meta," he asked, very gently, "don't you know that you and I have always been friends, and that Mr. Rivers was my hero when I was a boy. For your father's sake, dear, tell me what is troubling you, and let me try to help you."

"No one can do that."

"You are in bad spirits, and look at everything through black spectacles to-night. If you trust me, Meta, tell me what is worrying you."

"You will only laugh at me."

"Try me."

"I don't like Dr. Bertram."

"For the matter of that, neither do I," returned Lord Fane, "but your mother (don't be vexed with me, Meta) is always taking up strange fancies. The doctor is her last and rather less objectionable than some of the former ones."

Meta shivered.

"Surely the fellow has not dared to annoy you?" cried Lord Fane, as he noticed the movement.

"Oh, no, he is politeness itself; but I don't like him, and he has a most extraordinary influence over mother."

"You mean that Mrs. Rivers likes him very much."

Meta shook her head.

"I mean more than that. I am certain that she is like wax in Dr. Bertram's hands, he can make her do whatever he likes. Lord Fane, I have never spoken of this even to Ida, but every day I fear to hear that mother is going to forget all that is due to my father's memory, and put this man in his place."

Lord Fane started.

"But my dear child, your mother must be nearly twenty years Bertram's senior. She is—forgive me again—neither pretty nor attractive. There is nothing to make him forget the difference in their ages."

"Yes," contradicted Meta, "she has ten thousand a-year, and he has nothing. Oh, Lord Fane, can't you see now why I wished I was rich, or that I was poor enough to do what I liked without people minding. If I were rich I would go to America to my Aunt Penelope, and ask her to give me a home for father's sake. If I were quite poor, I would go out into the world and earn my own living rather than see a stranger in my father's place."

Fane pressed the little hand which lay on his arm. He had always been "fond" of Meta, it was only to-night he realised how much of the happiness of his life would go out of it if she left Hillington.

"You know," he said, gently, "I can't believe Mrs. Rivers would do such a thing; but, supposing you are right, I want you to tell me just this—why do you dislike Dr. Bertram? Is it aversion to him individually makes you so set against the marriage, or only the pain of seeing a stranger in your father's place?"

"I think it is aversion to him. He is a bad man. I can't explain my feeling, but I am afraid of him. I turn cold when I have to shake hands with him. I know that he does not really care for mother. Why, when he first came to Bankside, before he knew about papa's will, it was I he paid compliments to. I don't believe he wants anything but money, and he flatters mamma into thinking he is in love with her."

"Where did your mother pick him up? I know she met him in London, but—"

"She went to some dance where they exhibited some wonderful things done by mesmerism, and then people were invited to discuss what they had seen. Someone introduced her to Dr. Bertram, and she found their views just agreed. Then she told him she had heart disease and that no physician understood her complaint; and he said that particular phase of it had been his special study."

"She went to see him two or three times, and then she told me he had consented to sacrifice his career, and bury himself in the country to watch the course of her complaint."

"For a consideration, I suppose?"

"His salary is three hundred a-year, but she is always making him presents; and—"

The sentence was never finished. Dr. Bertram suddenly stood before them; whether he had been hidden by the hedge, or whether—as he said—he had been taking an evening stroll, and engrossed in their conversation they had not heard his footsteps, there was no telling. Unless they wanted a public scene there was nothing for it but to allow the doctor to accompany them back to Bankside.

Only Meta and Lord Fane would have given a great deal to know how much Bertram had overheard.

His tones had never been more silky or his

air more friendly, yet Fane felt the little hand on his arm tremble at each sound of Bertram's voice, and found himself detesting the handsome, foreign-looking doctor as he had never detested anyone before.

(To be continued.)

THE DOCTOR'S SECRET.

—101—

CHAPTER IV.

"It cannot be," Gordon Forbes answered. "I would give my life almost to give you an hour's pleasure, if it did not interfere with my duty to another whose fate lies in my hands. Surely you can see that. I pray you, Grace, to be reasonable. It may never happen this way again in years, ay, in a lifetime. Look up into my face with your own sweet smile, and say: 'Gordon, go, and my heart will be happier! I—I could almost do a miracle then.'"

"I shall do nothing of the kind," declared Grace. "I shall not brook such a slight. I shall hold you to your promise to go with me—at any cost."

"You speak hastily and in anger, dear one," he answered. "When you have taken time to reflect over it you will tell me so."

The heiress drew herself up to her full height, her terrible rage so overpowering her that she lost all control of her violent temper.

"If you prefer to go to that beggar brat in the hospital, whom anyone could see to, instead of coming with me, your choice be upon your own head for all time to come. What would it matter if the pauper died! The world would be rid of one beggar, at least!"

Gordon Forbes drew suddenly back as though she had struck him a blow. Had he heard aright? Had not his ears deceived him? Could this girl, whom he had thought little less than an angel, be so hard of heart as this—so inhuman!

"If you go we part for ever, Gordon Forbes!" she cried, hoarsely. "Do you hear me and realise what I am saying!"

"Surely you cannot mean it, love," he whispered, hoarsely. "You would not wreck your life and mine like that! I—I love you, Grace!"

"There are plenty of others who love me, and would be glad if we were to part," she said, recklessly. "I can easily get another lover."

Her words stung him to the heart's core.

"I must do my duty, my darling," he said, moving toward the door. "Surely, love, you will not let that part us!"

"If you go I will never look upon your face again," she repeated in a high, clear voice. "Take your choice—make it for now and for ever," she said.

He wavered. Could he lose the love of his heart? In the great battle between love and duty which would win? He was only human.

For one moment Gordon Forbes looked steadily into the face of the girl he loved.

"Am I to take you at your word, Grace!" he asked, hoarsely.

"Certainly," she declared.

"You force me to choose between love and duty, then!"

She turned away from him without deigning a reply, believing that, of course, he would follow her. But he did not; he called to her,—

"Grace, if I should neglect this little child, and her death should ensue in consequence, I should feel myself responsible for her death. The world might not call me a murderer, but I should feel myself one in the sight of Heaven. Good-bye, Grace. I shall live in the hope that when pride and anger die away in your heart you will call me back again."

Grace LeClerc pretended not to hear him. With a heart fairly bursting with rage she swept from the grand drawing-room.

He saw her pass up the broad velvet stairway, and thus she disappeared from his sight.

Like a man suddenly stricken blind he turned and groped his way out into the street. Entering

his carriage with an unsteady step he gave the order, sharply,—

"To the hospital. Be as quick as you can."

Almost before he realised it, his thoughts were in such a chaotic state, he reached his destination, and quickly made his way to the ward in which he knew he should find the little sufferer.

Once inside the building all the instincts of his profession returned to him. He forgot the world outside—ay, forgot even the sweetheart who had wounded him so deeply.

The doctors who were gathered about the bedside of the little patient made way for Doctor Forbes.

One glance at the beautiful childish face, and he started back in amazement. Where had he seen her before! Ah! the recollection came to him like a flash. Her face was like that of the girl whom he had seen at the — Street tenement early that day. This must be the little sister who she said was out selling matches for the poor, rheumatic old woman who had the rooms opposite her own. But he had no time to ponder over this now.

"Of course you have tried to find and notify her people!" said Forbes, anxiously.

"We have no clue to them," said Doctor Matthews.

At that moment Doctor Forbes noticed something clutched in the child's hand.

"We were unable to open the little one's fingers to see what she has there, and we fear her whole arm is paralyzed."

"The poor child was out of her latitude, it appears. She ran up the steps of a marble mansion to accost a young woman who was just coming out. But it was an unlucky move for her, for the young woman gave her a blow which sent the poor little thing reeling down the steps and quite across the pavement, landing her directly under the hoofs of the beautifully caparisoned horses attached to a handsome carriage awaiting the heartless young woman."

"We think it is a portion of the woman's dress she holds in her hand, for she caught at it to save herself from falling—so a by-stander told the ambulance surgeon who brought her here."

Doctor Forbes gently but firmly straightened out the little hand of the sufferer, and there fell from her little fingers something which made the blood in the veins of the young doctor fairly run cold with horror.

There fell upon the white coverlet a shred of violet silk and a bit of violet velvet!

By the greatest effort he refrained from crying aloud. He understood all.

This was the child he had seen running up the steps to where Grace Leclercq stood in waiting for her carriage. He did not see anything that had occurred after that because of the crush of the other vehicles.

He remembered that somebody had said that there was an accident to a little child; they guessed it could not be serious.

He remembered that he had turned his horses round and gone in another direction at that moment, believing that the driver had informed him correctly—that the slight little interruption in the traffic was not serious.

It was Grace Leclercq, the girl he loved, who had caused this little one to suffer so cruelly!

He set his lips hard together, and in that moment all the love in his heart for the beautiful, naughty heiress died a sudden death.

He thanked Heaven that he had not committed himself by asking her to be his wife.

"Gentlemen," he said, turning to the doctors gathered about him, "I feel sure that I can save this little one's limb from being amputated. I will take all the chances to bring her through all right."

He told himself that it was better that the unfortunate Mona should not know of the fate which had befallen her little sister until the worst was over.

An hour elapsed. The doctors scarcely breathed as they stood around Gordon Forbes, watching the doctor's deft movements.

At last Doctor Forbes breathed a sigh of relief.

"It is over," he cried. "She will live! Now let her sister be sent for."

He explained how he came by the information, trusting that he was right in his surmise that the girl Mona was the little one's sister.

"I will remain here until she comes," he said; "perhaps I may be able to soften the blow for her."

A carriage was quickly despatched for, and shortly afterward, terrified at the summons, Mona Tempest arrived at the hospital.

Doctor Forbes met her in the reception-room. He had broken many such a sad story to loved ones, but never had his heart been so thoroughly touched as it was in this instance. Never had he been more kind, more tender, in relating it.

He did not tell the young girl the worst. He merely informed her that little Minna had had a slight fall, and that some blundering by-stander had brought her to the hospital instead of taking her home, and that he knew by the remarkable resemblance between the two that she must be her little sister, and so he sent for her.

"The little one is asleep now," continued Doctor Forbes. "If I were in your place I would not disturb her by taking her home until the morrow," well knowing in his own mind that it would be many a morrow before she would be able to be removed.

He also told Miss Tempest that he was a physician, instead of the house-agent as she had supposed him to be that afternoon, and that it was he who had attended her little sister.

Mona thanked him with weeping eyes for what he had done for Minna, and for sending for her.

"Let me go to her," she said. "Oh, please do let me go to her!"

Kindly admonishing her not to awaken her little sister, Doctor Forbes led the way to the private ward to which he had had little Minna conveyed.

He did not tell her that the child was under opiates, and that she could not awaken her, no matter how hard she tried.

The scene when Mona was conveyed to her sister's bedside was pitiful.

"Oh, sir, if I only had her home, where I could watch over her!" she sobbed. "I could do my work and look after her too. But if she has to stay here until to-morrow I—I—shall not be able to come to see her; I must work so hard over my feather boss to get the money to pay the landlord his rent."

"Why, that brings to mind something that I was thinking of," said the doctor. "We were just about to put in an advertisement for a young girl to cut and make bandages at her home. Perhaps you would like to fill the vacancy. I think the work is as easy as making feather boss, and the remuneration is better. You could come and see your little sister every day then."

"Oh, thank you, sir! I should be so grateful if I could only secure that work!"

It almost seemed to Mona that she could not tear herself away from her little sister's bedside; but it was time for her to go, and she rose slowly from her seat, holding out her hand to the young doctor.

Doctor Forbes rose slowly too.

"It is very dark, and the storm is increasing. My brougham is at the door," he said.

For a moment the girl hesitated.

"You are very kind, sir, but I do not like to trouble you," she said. "I am used to facing the storm. I shall not mind it. There are not many streets to walk."

"I am obliged to go down your way," he said, "so you might as well ride with me. In fact, I have a call to make just a few doors from you."

"In that case I shall be glad to accept your offer," said Mona, simply.

He assisted her into the carriage, and took a seat opposite her.

As the brougham rolled along through the terrible drifts of snow Doctor Forbes told himself that the girl never could have made her way to her home on foot.

CHAPTER V.

It was a ride that Doctor Forbes never forgot. All at once he felt something in his soul awaken to life. He realised what had happened.

His heart had gone out in deep, fervent, sudden love to the young girl sitting opposite him, and he knew then that the feeling which he had experienced for Grace Leclercq was but the glamour of an infatuation.

He told himself that it must have been fate which kept him from going to the opera, having this greater pleasure in store for him. The very thought of the heartless heiress made him shudder. He considered that he had had a lucky escape.

They arrived at their destination all too soon to suit Doctor Forbes.

He assisted Miss Tempest to alight, feeling sorry, indeed, that the poor girl was obliged to go into that cold, cheerless house.

He had scarcely been driven half-a-dozen rods ere he thought he heard a piercing cry in a woman's voice.

Bitter as the night was, he opened the carriage window and listened; but the sound was not repeated, and he told himself that it must have been only his fancy.

He had told Miss Tempest that he would be in that neighbourhood about two o'clock the following afternoon, and that, if she wished to ride back with him, he would be only too glad to take her, as he would then be on his way to the hospital.

Although he had but just parted from her, he was longing for to-morrow afternoon to come with all his heart, that he might see her again. How sweet and good, and innocent she was! What a contrast there was between this lovely little creature and the proud, wealthy heiress Grace Leclercq!

He wondered if her brother Gus would keep his promise never to go and see Mona Tempest again.

Meanwhile, the object of his thoughts flew hurriedly up the stairs of the house to tell her only friend—the old lady across the passage—what had happened to little Minna.

She stopped short, hearing the sound of voices in the old lady's room. They were so loud and excited that they frightened the girl. She was just about to turn away when a coarse and brutal man appeared upon the threshold.

"There is no use in talking, old lady. You haven't the money to pay your rent, and our orders are to put you right out into the street, bag and baggage, without an hour's delay."

As these words fell upon Mona's ears she sprang quickly forward.

"Oh, sir, do not turn her out," she cried. "I have just had the promise of more work to-day, and will help her. You shall have the money for her rent just as soon as I can earn it."

"Don't you interfere, young woman," said the man, gruffly, thrusting her angrily aside.

"Do not fear this man," cried Mona, bravely, turning to the helpless old woman, who sat in a wooden chair by the cheerless, empty grate, crying as if her poor old heart would break. "Never mind him. You shall come and share my room with me."

"Not a bit of it," cried the man, gruffly. "I've got an order to take this old party away from here; and don't you interfere."

"But where are you to take her?" asked Mona.

"Well, she's to go to the poor-house, if you must know."

"To the poor-house?" exclaimed the poor old body, starting up. "Oh, Heaven! do not take me there, sir, I beg of you. I shall be able to work soon. The poor-house! Oh, who ever thought I should come to anything like that!—I, who have seen so much of life in my day. It would kill me to go there."

"Then the country would get out of supporting you," he retorted, brutally, with a loud laugh.

"I will support her, sir," said Mona. "What little I have I will gladly share with her."

"You don't make enough to keep yourself," he retorted.

Old Mrs. Moore hobbled eagerly forward.

"Do let me stay with her, sir," she begged. "Indeed, I'll not be any more of a burden to her than I can help. I won't eat any more than will barely keep the life in this old body."

"This girl isn't able to keep you, so there's an end of it," declared the man, in a decisive manner. "You ought to realize that. You would only be a burden to her."

"Allow me to be the judge of that," exclaimed Mona.

"Now don't go to make this any harder for the old woman," exclaimed the man, gruffly. "She's got to go, so there's the end of it. If she don't come along peacefully and quietly she'll have to come along by main force."

"Let me stay until after to-morrow," pleaded old Mrs. Moore. "To-morrow is Christmas, you know, and—and—I don't want to pass it in the poor-house. By the time next Christmas rolls round there won't be any need of doing for me."

"Do let her stay, sir," pleaded Mona. "Let me make her happy until after Christmas."

"I have to obey my orders, miss," declared the man. "Stand aside, and don't interfere in this matter."

"Let me stay until after Christmas," begged the old lady, piteously. "I won't need much from her. A bit of dry bread and a little tea will do me all day long."

The man shook his head emphatically. "I've no time to parley," he said, with a frown. "You know what's before you, so hurry along, my good woman."

Still she held back, with a bitter sob on her lips.

"My little Bob will come for me some time," she said. "Ah, he will surely come. I always think he will come for me on Christmas Day. He will come sooner or later. Oh, let me be here to see him, to take just one look at him, to—"

"What does she mean? Who is Bob?" exclaimed the man, eyeing the old lady sharply. "I thought she was alone in the world. At least, so I was told by the man who is looking after this affair."

"Bob is her boy," exclaimed Mona. "She let a wealthy family take him to bring up when he was only an infant. 'When he is big enough he shall come and see you at Christmas-time,' they told her. She lost trace of the family and her boy, but the poor old soul always watches for him every Christmas. She is up at the dawn of day, and sits by the window, watching eagerly up and down the street to be sure to catch the first sight of him when he appears. She even eats her meagre little Christmas dinner by the window, watching—watching all the time; but he never came."

"Perhaps he will come to-morrow," wailed the poor old soul. "It will be Christmas, you know, Mona."

"That's all sentiment, utter nonsense," sneered the man. "No doubt the fellow is either dead, or is perhaps breaking stones with a gang of convicts, with never a thought of this foolish old body."

Despite the protestations of Mona and the poor old soul she was hustled out of the meagre, cheerless old room, down the stairs, and into the Poor-house vehicle outside, while Mona, half fainting, convulsed with bitter tears, staggered to her own apartment and flung herself down on the window-seat, pressing her tear-stained face to the glass, and hoping against hope that the man would change his mind at the last moment.

Oh, how lonely it was without little Minna and poor old Mrs. Moore, to whom she had always been strangely drawn with an affection which she could scarcely account for.

At that moment there was a low tap on the door. Mona started to her feet. Who could it possibly be! The tap was certainly a strange one to her.

"Who is there, and what do you want?" called Mona, starting up and brushing the tear-drops from her cheeks.

There was no answer. She could not open the door until she had lighted the lamp. Swiftly crossing the room she reached for the little tin box, and hurriedly struck a match; but it went

out. Another and another met with like failure.

"What can be the matter with the matches?" thought Mona. "I have never known anything like this to occur before, and there's only two more left in the box. If they should serve me in the same way what in the world shall I do! I cannot open the door with the room in darkness."

Again there was another low tap. "I will open the door in a minute," said Mona. "As soon as I strike a match. The room is in darkness."

Her visitor seemed to be impatient, for the door-knob turned ever so slightly.

She had turned the key, as was her usual custom, otherwise whoever it was might have entered. Surely it must be the butcher's or baker's boy, she thought.

At last she succeeded in lighting the lamp, and the next moment hurried swiftly to the door, threw it open, and saw standing before her a handsomely dressed young man—the one whom she had seen in the carriage with Doctor Forbes.

CHAPTER VI.

"Ah! good evening, fair creature!" he began. "May I hope you were expecting me?"

Somewhat the words and tone sent a thrill of unaccountable fear to the girl's heart.

Without waiting for an invitation he deliberately walked into the room, and in his graceful fashion seated himself in the only arm-chair the meagre little apartment possessed, never once taking his eyes from the exquisite little figure of the girl, who still stood with her hand on the door-knob, watching him with wide-open, wondering eyes.

"I make myself quite at home, you see," he said, with an airy little laugh. "Pray sit down, fair one, and let us have a confidential chat. What a shame it is for a pretty creature like yourself to live in a tumble-down old barracks like this! Zounds! it is a great shame, I repeat."

"It is good enough for one in my position, sir," returned the girl, modestly. "Indeed, I am very thankful to Heaven to have so good a roof over my head."

"You are easily suited, sweet one," he declared.

Mona drew herself up to her full height. "Please, sir, do not address me as 'sweet one,'" she said, with dignity. "I may be a poor girl, but that does not give you the right to make fun of me."

"Upon my honour, I had no such intention," laughed Augustus LeClerc. "I wouldn't trifle with you for worlds."

"You said, sir, you wished to see me upon a matter of importance. Will you kindly state what it is?"

"Don't take on that tone and manner with me," he said. "I don't fancy it. Come, come; you're a pretty girl. I want to talk with you. Come and sit down here beside me, and we'll have a confidential chat."

Mona was frightened, she could not have told why.

"Thank you. I can hear all that you have to say where I am," she responded.

"I say sit down!" exclaimed LeClerc, roughly. "Don't be prudish. If there's anything I detect it's prudery in one in your station of life."

"I am at a loss to understand you, sir," said Mona. "If you would be so kind as to state the object of your visit I would thank you. Your words and manner puzzle me."

"There ought to be one thing quite patent to you," said LeClerc, "and that is that you have made a conquest. It was for your sake that the miserable occupants of this tenement have had a stay of two or three days. Were it not for you I should have turned them out at once."

"I am very glad if my words touched your heart," returned Mona, humbly.

"It was not your words—oh, no, my dear! I am used to that sort of story every day in the

week, when they haven't their money ready. It was that pretty face, those glorious eyes and tempting lips. I said to myself I would be willing to promise you anything to gain the privilege of one bewildering kiss. Will you grant me that because, for your sake, I have been so lenient with these people?"

Mona Tempest fairly gasped for breath as the full meaning of the rascal's words dawned upon her.

"Go!" she cried, turning white to the lips. "How dare you utter such words to me! Leave my presence at once. Though you are a rich landlord and I your humble tenant, earning my bread by my daily labour, I will not submit to insult. Go! I repeat. I shall move at once."

"Upon my word, I like this delightful little burst of temper," declared LeClerc, settling himself back in his seat. "You are the first little beauty who has so wilfully defied me, and upon my word it gives zest to the affair. Don't be so tragic, my dear; sit down beside me. I'm not an ogre. Ladies find me quite pleasant—a delightful fellow to know, in fact."

"I do not wish to know you, sir," said Mona Tempest, with all the dignity she could command.

"We have paid you rent for these two meagre rooms as far back as we can remember, that is all you need to know of us. I care to know nothing of you."

"Oh, my, how independent we are!" sneered LeClerc. "It doesn't pay to be quite so high and mighty. Don't you know I could turn you out into the street if I wanted to—at once!"

"That would not kill me, sir," answered the girl. "I am young, and as long as I have work I can get along."

"You are still three weeks back in your rent," said LeClerc, furious at her utter contempt of his power.

Mona ran to the little bureau across the room, and took from it some silver.

"Here is your money, sir," she said. "I finished some work after you left, took it home, and got the money for it. Here it is. Now go! I owe you nothing!"

(To be continued.)

HER HEARTLESS MOTHER.

(Continued from page 560.)

Full of pity and compassion Violet strove to relieve him, and to draw his spirit up to those pure heights that she herself had reached by means of earnest, helpful, persuasive words. He listened to all that she said without making any sarcastic comment upon it.

"You are the only star that lightens the darkness of my life, Violet," he remarked, presently. "I won you by unfair means, but you have never failed in allegiance or wisely duty towards me, and when I am gone you will find that I have done what little I could to atone for the wrong inflicted upon you in the past. You cannot hide the truth from me. I know that I am dying, and that I have made a fatal mistake in living for self and the world alone. The last page has been turned, and there is nothing more to be done save to write 'Finitis' at the bottom of it."

He fell asleep again with Violet's hand still firmly clasped in his, and Violet, worn out by constant vigils, felt herself growing dull and drowsy. She made an effort to keep herself awake, but tired nature asserted its rights in spite of her, and her head fell back against the cushions of her chair in deep, dreamless slumber.

When she awoke she was in her own room, with the sun streaming in dusty beams through the bars of the green venetian blind, and the scent of lilac and muguet from the garden below pervading the breeze that kissed her forehead.

"How did I come here?" she said, quickly, as she rose from the couch on which they had

placed her. "Why did you remove me from the sick room, Felicie?"

"There, madame, the Comte de Beauville is no more," replied the woman, with a sob. "He passed away quietly enough in his sleep, and we had not the heart to wake you, you were so weary. Alas! it seems but the other day that you were married, and he stood by you looking so handsome, so gallant, so devoted, and now he is dead!"

Freedom had at length been granted to Violet, freedom that she could avail herself of without a shadow of remorse.

Lady Montagu was in town when the news of her son-in-law's death reached her, and, without being requested to do so, she immediately started for Nice to join her daughter.

No better opportunity for a reconciliation between them would ever occur, she told herself, triumphantly.

Now that Violet was enjoying the fruits of her mother's deep-laid scheme in the shape of the Comte de Beauville's ample fortune, without the drawback of the individual himself, she could surely afford to pardon such an exemplary parent for any sentimental sorrow inflicted upon her for own good at an earlier period.

Her ladyship was somewhat taken aback though by Violet's cool greeting, and the absence of all demonstrative woe that distinguished her from other mourners.

She had quite expected to find a very helpless orthodox young widow, existing in an atmosphere of tears and black crape, who would require to be taken in tow by a clever, managing mother, proud to own the rich and lovely Comtesse as her child, and not unwilling to assume the direction of her affairs.

It hardly pleased her so well to be confronted instead by a graceful, self-possessed woman, clad in simple black, her coils of wavy brown hair undisturbed by any monument of ugliness in the shape of a widow's cap.

"You need hardly have put yourself to the fatigue of such a long, tiring journey, mamma," Violet remarked, as they sat opposite to each other in the pretty drawing-room. "I have managed very well, so far; and now that the funeral is over and the will read little remains to be done."

"My dear child, do you suppose that any amount of fatigue would prevent me from doing my duty, especially on such a mournful occasion as the present one?" said Lady Montagu effusively. "Who more fit to be with you in your hour of bereavement than your own mother? I should have been here before only I stayed in Paris for a day or two, just to get some decent mourning dresses from Worth's."

Violet's delicate upper-lip curled almost imperceptibly as she heard the cause that had served to delay her sympathetic parent on the road.

"Mamma, I think it will be best for us to come to an understanding with each other at once," she said, firmly. "I am acquainted with the part you took in separating me from Kenneth Graham, and palming off a falsehood upon me in order to serve your own ends with the assistance of one now dead. I have forgiven him. I am also willing to forgive you; but we can never again be to each other what many who stand in the same relation can claim to be, with regard to mutual love and confidence. All that is at an end for ever."

"You are an ungrateful girl," replied her ladyship, indignantly. "But for me you would not be occupying your present enviable position, and if your obstinate attachment to that unfortunate young barrister compelled me to resort to subterfuge in order to get you married to the Comte de Beauville you were the most to blame. A pretty thing it would have been for you had become Mrs. Graham, the wife of a professional man who is now at floundering from softening of the brain, or some dreadful thing of that kind. You ought to thank me for what I did then instead of using such wicked, untruthful expressions."

"I cannot thank you for changing the current of my life solely against my will, and causing me

years of misery," said her daughter, sadly, "and I would far rather have married Kenneth Graham, my first and only love, in spite of either poverty or sickness awaiting us in the future. But it is worse than useless to dwell any longer upon such topics."

"Of course you will return to England with me, for the present, pending the legal business that may not be settled for some months to come," remarked her ladyship authoritatively.

"No," replied Violet, "I have already formed my plans, and I cannot alter them. I have been sorely tried of late, and I need rest for both mind and body, more complete rest and retirement than I could possibly have in Park-lane. I am going as a boarder to my old convent-school near Brussels. They have willingly agreed to take me, and I start to-morrow for the dear old place where some of my happiest days were spent."

"Perhaps when you are there you will take the veil," said Lady Montagu, with angry irony, mortified beyond measure to learn how completely her daughter had passed away from her control. "You seem to manage your affairs so even without aid or advice from those most intimately connected with you."

"No, I shall not take the veil," returned Violet, calmly. "I only want time to recruit my shattered nerves and health in perfect seclusion before taking up my proper position in the world again."

"It is a ridiculous idea," said her mother still, "but I suppose you must be allowed to do as you like now. By the way, Violet, your husband, as you are perhaps aware, was generous enough to add five hundred a-year to my ridiculously small income during his life-time. I am naturally anxious to know if his death will cause any difference, or serve to alter existing arrangements."

"No, not where you are concerned," replied Violet. "Any advantages that you have hitherto reaped from my marriage, mamma, you will continue to enjoy. I have it in my power to promise you this."

"And a great deal besides," thought Lady Montagu, as she swept away to her room, feeling both indignant and disappointed at the unexpected turn affairs had taken. "He has left her enormously rich, and she may just as well pay Worth for those dresses I ordered of him the other day. The dress she is wearing herself might have been put together by the coachman, for all the style there is in it."

CHAPTER VII.

FAITHFUL to her word Violet betook herself on the following day to the white-walled convent near Brussels, standing in the centre of its large shady flower-scented garden—a little world apart from that larger one in which she had gained so much dearly-bought experience.

Violet had always been a favourite with the Reverend Mother and the Sisters during her schooldays, and now they petted and made much of her as a boarder.

The calm, peaceful, consecrated life they led, with its simple round of duties and relaxations, tended to soothe and strengthen her weary spirit, and prepare her once more to take her part in the active throbbing drama of existence going on beyond the convent walls.

The Comte de Beauville had done what he could to recompense her for past injuries by making Violet one of the richest widows in France.

Two of his estates and a princely income were bequeathed to her in his will, to the profound and loudly-expressed indignation of the de Beauville family, who were compelled to look on and see themselves robbed, as they termed it, by an Englishwoman who had gained such an ascendancy over their deceased relative by means of her lovely face and soft, winning ways. The true version of the story was never revealed to them, and so they enjoyed their own highly original one to the end.

Violet had not been long at the convent when

she received a visit from the Marchioness of Creamshire. That kind-hearted, stately old dame had never ceased to evince a deep interest in her godchild's welfare, and she gladly availed herself of such a good opportunity for a long uninterrupted conversation with the young widow.

Inquiries after mutual acquaintances, and a detailed account of all the events that had transpired since their last meeting, kept them fully occupied at first. Then the question that had so long been hovering upon Violet's lips found vent in words.

"Do you know if Mr. Graham is better?" she inquired, falteringly. "I have not read anything about him in the papers lately."

"He is better, poor fellow," said the Marchioness, compassionately, "but he is still far from being strong or well. I went to see him the other day before leaving home, and I found him a perfect wreck, quite unable as yet to resume his professional work, which is falling sadly in arrears. He was always a favourite of mine, you know," she continued, "and your mother and I have never been quite so friendly together, Violet, since she gave him his *conge* in such a peremptory manner when he was no longer heir to his uncle's title and estate. You were very young at the time, but I think you were wrong in allowing yourself to be so easily persuaded into renouncing your first lover."

"I was not persuaded, I was duped, deceived, misled," she replied, sorrowfully; "otherwise I should have remained true to Kenneth Graham, and our lives would not have been the severed, blighted, unsatisfactory things they are now. Do not judge me until you know all."

The Marchioness listened intently to Violet's account of her second engagement, and the various motives that had led up to her marriage with the Comte de Beauville. When it came to an end she drew the slender girlish form nearer to her, with a motherly, pitying air that Lady Montagu was incapable of assuming, while she kissed the sweet tremulous upturned face.

"My poor child," she said, gently, "you have, indeed, been the victim of other people's unprincipled schemes. And yet I am glad to know that you did not willingly induce so much pain upon Kenneth Graham when you rejected him in favour of the Comte de Beauville. It always perplexed and grieved me to think of such cruel, unscrupulous conduct in connection with my little Violet. It seems hard, indeed, that another barrier should have arisen between you in place of the one just removed."

"What do you mean? Is Mr. Graham about to be married?" said Violet, quickly.

"Oh, dear, no, marriage is about the last idea likely to occur to him," rejoined the elder woman, with a smile. "I allude to your large fortune, Violet, which must always prevent you from coming together as man and wife. Kenneth Graham is far too proud to marry anyone possessed of more wealth than he can lay claim to himself, especially when that wealth formerly belonged to a successful rival. I ventured to sound him upon the subject, and I found him inexorable."

"I ought not so much as to think of forming fresh ties yet," said Violet, with a vivid blush; "but, dear godmother, don't you fancy that after a time he will relent and woo me again, in spite of my fortune, if he really cares for me?"

"I fear that it will always be a stumbling-block in the way of your happiness," said the Marchioness, dubiously. "He will never be persuaded to overlook it. It may seem an extreme thing to say, but I almost wish that you had been left poor instead of rich at your husband's death; then Kenneth would have sought you out at once, and I believe that he only requires some lasting stimulus to restore him to health and strength again."

The Marchioness of Creamshire's visit supplied Violet with plenty of food for reflection, and it was remarked by the inmates of the convent that she became unusually quiet and thoughtful after it, as if she were revolving some important project in her mind.

Sorrow and suffering had tended to quell her former high spirits, and make her feel prena-

turally grave and old. But one day, as she stood in the sunlit garden, gathering great sheaves of fragrant dew-drenched white lilies for a church festival, it smote upon her like a sudden revelation that she was still in the very heyday of youth and health. Happiness might yet be waiting for her somewhere in the golden future—happiness rich and deep enough to make her forget the mournful past.

The bright sunshine, the fresh morning breeze, the waving boughs all seemed to impress the glad fact upon her. It was like drinking in a deep draught of joyous new life; and she never forgot that wonderful moment.

The quiet routine of the convent began to pall upon her, and her health being thoroughly recruited, Violet took leave of the sheltering home and the kindly hearts it contained, and returned to England for the first time since her marriage.

For the sake of peace and quietness she made her home with Lady Montagu in Park-lane. On the day after her return she went alone to the office of Messrs. Mitchell and Hayward, the family solicitors, and had a long interview with the principal. To that good, but short-tempered man she unfolded a proposition that would have caused his hair to stand on end had he not for several years past been in the habit of wearing one of Truefitt's most elaborate wigs.

Kenneth Graham, looking wearily out through the windows of the sitting-room in the Temple, had just arrived at the conclusion that life for him was as dull and grey an affair as the murky sky overhead. He could neither die nor get well; legal work was out of the question, when his head ached and became confused if he attempted anything that required close thought and steady attention, while the very wish to recover, save for the sake of regaining his own prestige, had been taken from him with Violet.

He was leaning forward in a drooping, despondent attitude, one thin white hand supporting his head, and "Sartor Resartus" lying neglected at his feet, when the door opened gently, and Violet entered the room.

To his astonished eyes her bright, delicate beauty looked more flower-like than ever, owing to the soft, dark dress, finished off at throat and wrist with creamy lace ruffles, that she wore.

"Violet!" he exclaimed, electrified into sudden animation, "My Violet!"

And then, before either of them knew exactly what had happened, she was kneeling beside him, while his arm encircled her in a tender, silent embrace.

"You ought not to have come," he said, at length, half-ashamed to think how the delightful fact of her presence had thrown him off his guard. "Violet, my love, this brief spell of intense happiness can only lead to the pain of another parting between us."

"Why must we part again?" she inquired, calmly, while that long, muscular arm still encircled her slender waist, and Kenneth felt that she was making hay of all his stern resolutions.

"Your large fortune and my wretched health are the impediments in our way," he said, sadly but firmly. "Dear, it will be better for us to live far apart since friends we cannot be, and lovers we may not be through the force of circumstances."

"Your health will soon improve when I am your nurse," rejoined Violet, with a smile full of hidden meaning. "As to the other obstacle, my fortune, surely you don't consider the four hundred a-year left to me by a maiden aunt a very disproportionate income; your own is far in advance of it, sir."

Four hundred a year! he repeated incredulously. "I thought your husband had left you nearly the whole of his large fortune, Violet."

"Perhaps he did!" she continued. "Perhaps, having heard from a real friend that a certain high-principled barrister had refused to be reconciled to me on account of my money-bags, I made arrangements to return them all to

the de Beauville family, who will be only too glad to accept them, merely stipulating that they should continue to pay the five hundred a-year to my mother that she has been in receipt of ever since my marriage. For myself I have kept back nothing, in order to render our reunion possible. Kenneth, are you pleased with me for what I have done?"

"The sacrifice is too great; I cannot allow you to make it for my sake!" he said, brokenly; but there were tears of happiness in his grey eyes the while. It is so sweet to find the one you love willing to sacrifice all in turn for the love of you.

"But it is all sealed, signed, and settled," she replied, decisively. "Dear old Mitchell nearly went into a fit over it. He could not understand such a wild freak on the part of his wealthy client. You see, Kenneth, that I am not to be got rid of on any terms."

"I am such a wreck," he began, reluctantly. "Shall I be justified in permitting you to share my altered life? My cause is a sorry one, Violet, for I am compelled to plead against my own happiness."

"Be brief, then," she retorted, lightly. "I am retained for the defence, and I mean to gain the day. I know that you will recover, Kenneth; at least you will try to do so when your life means so much to me, and until then it will be my delight to act both as nurse and doctor to you. I warn you that I shall adopt the kill or cure system. I have a theory to the effect that women doctors are far more practical than their male brethren. Are you willing to embrace my theory?"

"I would much rather embrace you," he replied, suiting the action to the word. "Violet, after all that you have renounced on my account I cannot put from me the joy for which I have so long hungered, the joy above all others, of calling you my wife. And since we are to come together let it be soon—bachelor freedom has lost all charm for me."

"If, I mean our marriage, shall take place whenever you like," said Violet, with downcast eyes. "Oh, Kenneth, how much we have to be grateful for when we remember that some long-lingering hearts have been compelled to dwell apart in sorrow and silence for ever."

After their marriage, at which Lady Montagu condescended to be present, Kenneth Graham and his bride started for Wales on their wedding-tour. Mountain air, good diet, a devoted nurse, and last, but not least a mind free from care and trouble, did wonders for the young barrister in restoring him to health and vigour. His opening speech in the first *cause célèbre* after his long illness astonished even himself. In concise, logical argument, persuasive eloquence, and pungent wit, it far surpassed all his previous triumphs of oratory. Once more his feet were firmly planted on the high-road that leads to fame and fortune.

"Richard's himself again," he said to his fair young wife, who had been present when the speech in question was delivered. "I feel that I have only to go in and win. You shall be Lady Graham yet, Violet, if titles are to be won by those who work hard to obtain them."

"Never mind the title," she replied, as she stood on tiptoe to kiss her tall husband. "I could not possibly be prouder of my dear old boy than I am at present. Oh, Kenneth, how wise you were, when instead of waiting for old Lord Fossiter's gouty shoes, you determined to make your own."

"And love supplied the leather," said Kenneth, laughingly, as side by side they descended the wide staircase to welcome the guests who were even then assembling under their hospitable roof.

[THE END.]

WHAT we call miracles and wonders of art are not so to him who created them; for they were created by the natural movements of his own great soul. Statues, paintings, churches, poems, are but shadows of himself.

GRATEFUL—COMFORTING.

EPPS'S COCOA

BREAKFAST—SUPPER.

"By a thorough knowledge of the natural laws which govern the operations of digestion and nutrition, and by a careful application of the fine properties of well-selected Cocoa, Mr. Epps has provided for our breakfast and supper a delicately flavoured beverage which may save us many heavy doctors' bills. It is by the judicious use of such articles of diet that a constitution may be gradually built up until strong enough to resist every tendency to disease. We may escape many a fatal shaft by keeping ourselves well fortified with pure blood and a properly nourished frame."—*Civil Service Gazette*.

Made simply with boiling water or milk. Sold only in packets and 1 lb. tins, by Grocers, labelled thus:—**JAMES EPPS & Co., Ltd., Homoeopathic Chemists, London.**

Makers of Epps's Cocoa or Cocoa Nib-Extract:—A thin beverage of full flavour, with many beneficially taking the place of tea.

OTTEYS UNLABELLED STRONG PILLS

Are twice as efficacious as any others, and always quickly and certainly relieve. Greatly superior to Steel and Pennyroyal. Invaluable to women.

Post free for 1s and 2s stamps from **THOMAS OTTEY, Chemist, Burton-on-Trent.** Please mention paper.

TOOTH-ACHE

CURED INSTANTLY BY

BUNTER'S
Prevents Decay, Saves Extractions, Sleepless Nights
NERVINE
Nervous Headaches and all Nervous Pains removed by BUNTER'S NERVINE. All Chemists, 1s. 4d.

STOUT PERSONS

Should try Dr. Vincent's Anti-Stout Pills. They will permanently reduce superfluous flesh, in some cases as much as 10 lbs. in a week. They are guaranteed perfectly harmless and pleasant to take. 3/-, 4/- and 10/- a box post free from **DR. VINCENT, 47, Park Ridge, Hammersley, London.** Mention this paper.

£20 TOBACCONISTS COMMENCING.
See Illus. Guide and Catalogue (729 pages), 3s. How to open a Cigar Store, from £20 to £200. TOBACCONISTS' & CIGAR VENDING CO., 189, Tottenham Road, London. (Over 50 years' reputation.) Manager, H. MYERS.

DOES YOUR HEAD ACHE?

"KAPUTINE" cures instantly.

Enclose stamped addressed envelope to "K., KAPUTINE, LTD., HUDDERSFIELD, for free samples with name of nearest agent.

INDIARUBBER STAMPS

For Handing Note-paper, Working Letters, Receipts, Facsimiles, and all Business Purposes. **MONOGRAMS.**—Two-Letter, is. Three-Letter, 1s. 6d. Your name in full, 1s. 4d. Postage 3d. extra. This price includes Stamp, mounted on brass complete, with Box, Pads, and Ink. Price Lists of all kinds free.

J. BERKLEY, LIVERY ST., BIRMINGHAM

THE ONLY MEANS for DESTROYING HAIR ON THE FACE

is by using **ALEX. ROSS'S** ordinary "Depilatory" 1s. 6d.; post, 3s. 9d. For strong hair, the Electric Appliance, 2s. For thick hair, the German Process, 4s., and Counteracting Liquid, 10s. 6d.; post, 1s. His Castor-oil product whiteners, or hair on the head. His Skin Tightener, a liquid for removing furrows and, grown feet marks under the eyes, are each sold at 3s. 6d.; by post for 50 stamps. The Nose Machine, for pressing the cartilage of the nose into shape and the Ear Machine, for outstanding ears, are sold at 10s. 6d. or sent by stamps.—**ALEX. ROSS, 55, Theobald's Road, High Holborn, London.** Had through all Chemists. Letters replied to in stamped envelope; parcels sent free from charges.

THE SECRET ONE BOX OF DR. MACKENZIE'S IMPROVED HARMLESS ARSENIC COMPLEXION WAFERS

will produce the most lovely complexion that the imagination could desire; clear, fresh, free from blotch, freckles, or pimples. Post-free for 3s. 6d.; half boxes, 2s. 6d.—**S. HAKLEY, 5, Denman Street, London Bridge, S.E.**

Use **DR. MACKENZIE'S ARSENICAL TOILET SOAP**, 1s. per Tablet; unscented, 6d. per Tablet. **ABSOLUTELY HARMLESS.** Beware of the many imitations. Have Dr. Mackenzie's or none.

FACETIÆ.

QUIZ: "I say, now, do you really believe that ignorance is bliss?" Fizz: "I don't know. You seem to be happy."

"WELL," said a weary husband to his nagging spouse, "do just as you like." "I shan't do anything of the kind; so there."

MISTRESS: "I hope you sweep behind the door, Mary." Mary: "Rather mum. It's the easiest way to get the dust out of sight."

AN ODDITY: "I wouldn't be as eccentric as that man is for worlds." "What is his peculiar form of eccentricity?" "He has never learned to ride a bicycle." "Good gracious!"

BROWN: "Here is some tobacco, my poor man. You must feel the loss of a smoke after dinner." Beggar: "No, sir. I feel the loss of my dinner before the smoke."

THEIR "SYMPATHY."—"Does your family sympathise with you when you have insomnia?" "Yes. When I can't sleep I sit up all night and practise on my accordion."

"It's very remarkable," said Mr. Young, husband, with a satisfied smile. "What is it?" asked his wife. "Whenever I sing to the baby it immediately becomes quiet." "Yes, the little darling is so easily frightened."

"You want a job in my warehouse, hey? Have you any recommendations from your last employer, my boy?" Boy: "Nuthin', in writin'. But he said he was very glad to part with me."

LUCY: "If your fiancé wished you to go for an evening drive, and invited a half-blind old lady as chaperon, how should you regard it?" Madge: "I should regard it as an opportunity to be embraced."

"WHY, I'd like to know," said a lady once to a distinguished judge, "cannot a woman become a successful lawyer?" "It simply arises from her invariable habit of giving her opinion without any pay," answered the judge.

FARMER: "You had a fire at the manse this morning? Any serious loss?" Minister: "Yes, ten years' sermons were completely burnt." Farmer (with the memory of many a weary Sunday morning): "Mon, they made a grand blaze, they were so dry, ye ken."

"WELL, after dinner Borestone told a story about his exploits in Africa, and then one about an Irishman he met in Switzerland." "But I thought you were not at the banquet?" "Nor was I at this particular one, but I have attended sixteen others where Borestone told these stories."

"SMALLWEED looks frightfully ill. Never saw such an awful wreck, poor beggar!" "Yes, he's had a bad cold for the last week, and—" "But you don't mean to say it's pulled him down like that?" "Well, not exactly; but he was fool enough to adopt all the different remedies his friends advised. I wonder he's lived through it."

"ARE there not times," said a man, entering the office of a busy editor, "when you can write better than at other times?" "Yes." "Ah, I thought so. That men who write are affected by their environment I have no doubt. Now tell me, when can you write best?" "When I am alone," the editor replied.

A TOURIST in Switzerland who was about to make the ascent of a mountain thought best to ask some questions as to the capabilities of his guide. "Is he a thoroughly skilful climber?" he asked of an hotel-keeper. "I should say so," exclaimed the innkeeper. "He has lost two parties of tourists down the mountain side, and escaped without a scratch both times."

THE latest story of German "thrift" is told at the expense of the proprietor of a circulating library, who charged for the wear and tear suffered by his books at the hands of his patrons. One volume came back to his scrutiny. "See here," he exclaimed, "there is a hole on page fifteen of my beautiful book. And see here," he went on, turning over the leaf, "there is another on page twenty."

A GENTLEMAN was assisting at a bazaar last winter by reciting now and again during the evening. He had recited once or twice, and the people were sitting about chaffing, when he heard one of the committee go up to the chairman and whisper: "Haden't Mr. — better give us another recitation now?" Whereupon the chairman replied: "No, not yet; let them enjoy themselves a bit longer."

"I WANT a bicycle for my boy." "Yes, sir. Want a good one?" "Yes. What will a first-class machine cost?" "Well, a really first-class machine will cost you £25. It isn't economy, you know, to—" "Great Croesus! I can't go as high as that! Haven't you something that—" "Oh, yes; we've got a splendid line here for £7 10s. None better in the world. It isn't economy, I was about to say, to pay a high price just for style."

Two Irishmen went a little way out to see some friends, and, drinking a little too freely, they were much in liquor. Their friends would fain have persuaded them to stay all night, but they determined to go home. They set out accordingly, but before they had got a mile on their way one reeled and fell into a ditch. The other, hearing him fall, yelled out: "Patrick! shure if you are dead tell me." "No, honey," said Patrick; "I'm not dead, but only spacheless."

RECENTLY at a railway station, close to London, a Frenchman alighted from an early morning train, and wanting some information as to what he should do to reach his destination, was in some difficulty, as neither he nor the staff on duty could understand each other's language. At this point the inspector came forward, saying: "Get away, you chaps; let me talk to him," which he did. He placed his hand to the side of his mouth, and in his very best English he shouted in the Frenchman's ear: "If you wait here till nine o'clock I shall have a man on duty who can speak your confounded language."

AMONG the advertisements in a German paper there lately appeared the following: "The gentleman who found a purse with money in the Blumenstrasse is requested to forward it to the address of the loser, as he was recognised." A few days afterwards the reply was inserted: "The recognised gentleman who picked up a purse in the Blumenstrasse requests the loser to call at his house."

"THE new trained nurse has come, doctor. She looks rather young, and seems to lack self-confidence. She says she has not had a great deal of experience, though she looks intelligent, and says she thinks she can learn." Doctor: "She thinks she can learn, does she? Send her here at once. It's about twenty-five years since I've had a nurse who thought there was anything she didn't know, and it will be a refreshing experience. Send up the prodigy."

TO LADIES.

HEALTHY, WEALTHY & WISE.

An interesting little COPYRIGHT TREATISE, which should be carefully read by every English Wife. Sent FREE on receipt of a stamped addressed envelope. —Apply M.D., 217, Graham Road, London, N.E. Please name this Paper.

AN HONEST MEDICINE.

DR. DAVIS'S FAMOUS PILLS FOR FEMALES ARE UNEQUALLED.

64d., 1s. 1½d., 2s. 9d., 4s. 6d.; Sent free from observation by DR. DAVIS, 339, PORTOBELLO ROAD, LONDON, W.

Dr. Davis's little book for MARRIED WOMEN, most invaluable, sent free on receipt of a stamped addressed envelope.

All communications respecting Advertisements should be addressed to the

"LONDON READER" OFFICE,
334, Strand, London, W.C.

MAYPOLE SOAP

(PATD.) For Home Dyeing.

NEW STYLE OLD STYLE

WON'T WASH OUT OR FADE.

NO MESS NO TROUBLE.

MAYPOLE SOAP WASHES & DYES DOESN'T DYE THE HANDS

FOR DYEING Blouses, Dresses, Underlinens, Ribbons, Children's Frocks, Pinafores, Lamp Shades, Silk Scarves, Handkerchiefs, Gentlemen's Shirts, Lace Curtains, Silk Gloves, Stockings, Antimacassars, Toilet Mats, Shawls, etc., etc.

MAYPOLE SOAP Dyes any Colour. 4d. per Tablet (Black, 6d.). SOLD EVERYWHERE.

THE MAYPOLE SOAP SYNDICATE, LIMITED, 98, HIGH HOLBORN, LONDON, W.C.

SOCIETY.

THE new Imperial yacht, the *Standart*, which the firm of Burmeister and Wain in Copenhagen have built for the Tsar of Russia, and which will probably be used for the first time to convey their Imperial Majesties to England, is a very fine vessel, although by strict command everything approaching unnecessary luxury has been avoided. The exterior of the yacht can best be described as "neat," the only adornments being the large golden eagle, and the Russian Imperial Arms. The interior contains, in addition to the accommodation for the Tsar and Tsaritz and other members of the family, spacious and well-furnished cabins for the officers and crew, while all the machinery is encased in light wood, by which means the heat is reduced to a minimum. The horse-power is registered at nearly 10,000, and the vessel is capable of attaining to a speed of twenty-two knots. The comfort and well-being of the crew have been studied, and there are baths and a hospital ward, as well as an apothecary on board. The officers' cabins are very tastefully decorated, in spite of their simplicity, and contain each a convenient writing-table and spacious cupboard. The accommodation provided for the Imperial Family consists of saloons and cabins, all fitted with severely plain furniture and decorations, exact directions being given in advance to use subdued colours, and avoid the slightest touch of gilding. The ceilings are painted white and the panelling and doors of the drawing-room and dining-saloon are of dark wood and birds-eye maple respectively, the furniture of the latter being covered with olive-green brocade—the only instance where the use of silk material has been permitted. The Tsar's library, sleeping cabin and bathroom, are close together, the fittings of the former being light American cherry wood, while the chairs and couch are covered with gray-blue leather. The Tsaritz's three apartments are equally unpretentious, the furniture being made of the palest gray birchwood, covered with blue and white cretonne. The Empress Marie Feodorowna's private suite of cabins are panelled with birds-eye maple, and upholstered in grey cretonne with a bold design in crimson poppies. The state dining-saloon, capable of seating seventy persons, is fitted with light oak, inlaid with maple, and has three handsome chandeliers fitted with electric light, the means of illumination employed, of course, all over the vessel. At one end of the saloon are two reception rooms, and at the other an enclosed space, where, sheltered from the wind, the Imperial occupants may sit and enjoy the view.

The Queen will stay in Scotland until the second week in November, when the Court is to remove to Windsor Castle.

THERE will be a pleasant family gathering at Balmoral to which the Queen is most eagerly looking forward. Not only is her eldest widowed daughter the Empress Frederick, hoping to pay her Majesty a visit, but it is now settled that, all circumstances permitting, the Tsaritz will also go to Balmoral as well as the Grand Duke and Grand Duchess of Hesse, and the Grand Duke Serge and Grand Duchess Elizabeth. The Tsar will not, it is feared, be able to remain with his wife more than a day or two; but she will certainly bring with her the baby Grand Duchess Olga, whom the Queen is most anxious to see, and the Tsaritz is naturally anxious to show to her English relatives.

EVERYONE in Paris is going wild over the tone kerchiefs just now. The linen thread is dyed in fast colours before it is woven, and it is marvellous to see what delicate tones are obtained. The pale greys, blues and greens and dainty shades of rose, lavender and yellow are most in demand. Some of the handkerchiefs are perfectly plain with the narrow hem, some are edged with real lace, while others are embroidered. One of the prettiest has a plain edge and a garland of true lover's knots in delicate tracery. Another, of pale rose, has a bow knot in one corner and garlands of forget-me-nots in the other corners.

STATISTICS.

It is said that locomotives use a third of the coal mined in England.

THERE are 3,000 words in the English language that are not in the dictionary.

ONE hundred and twenty firemen are required to feed the furnaces of a first-class Atlantic steamer.

THE area of the Transvaal is 220,000 square miles, and the whole population numbers less than the population of Liverpool.

ONLY two total eclipses of the sun have been visible in London during the last 1,000 years. It is estimated that the next total eclipse visible in London will be on June 14th, 2157.

GEMS.

SOME people's charity begins with their last will and testament.

LOVE never contracts its circles; they widen by as fixed and sure a law as those around a pebble cast into still water.

IT was the saying of a heathen that he who would do good must either have a faithful friend to instruct him or a watchful enemy to correct him.

HONEST never hurt any one, never yet interfered with duty—nay, always strengthens to the performance of duty, gives courage and clears the judgment.

EVERY one has an ideal of life higher than his actual life reaches. We should all like to be better, nobler, more just and generous and disinterested than we are. Through self-discipline alone can we climb this ladder and approach this ideal.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

TO REMOVE INK STAINS.—Fresh ink stains may be removed by soaking in milk or saffron, and then washing with Sunlight Soap.

DELICIOUS POTATO PANCAKES.—Boil six medium sized potatoes in salted water until thoroughly cooked, mash them, and set aside to cool, then add three well-beaten eggs, a quart of milk, and flour enough to make a pancake batter. Bake quickly on a well-greased griddle, and serve very hot.

CABBAGE SALAD.—Many who don't care for cooked cabbage enjoy this relish. Slice fine a head of cabbage, and place it in the ice-box. Make a dressing of one-half cup of white sugar, two tablespoonfuls of butter and one tablespoonful of flour, well beaten together, and two eggs well beaten. Stir in slowly one-half cup of vinegar, half a teaspoonful each of salt and mustard. Stir well together until smooth, then cook in a double kettle until thick as custard. Set away to cool. Just before serving pour the dressing over the cabbage and mix well.

A BLACKBERRY PUDDING.—For six you will require one quart of berries, two eggs, two ounces of butter, one cup (half pint) of milk, one and a half cups of flour, two level teaspoonfuls of baking powder, and a half-teaspoonful of salt. Separate the eggs, add the milk to the yolks, melted butter, salt and flour. Beat well, add the baking powder, and then stir in the well-beaten whites; put into a greased, shallow baking-pan. Pour in the blackberries, and press them gently down in the batter. Dust over one cup of granulated sugar, and bake in a quick oven thirty minutes. Serve hot with milk. This pudding should be about one inch in thickness when it goes in the oven. Any kind of fruit may be used in place of berries—apples, peaches, cherries or plums.

MISCELLANEOUS.

DWARF oxen, thirty inches in height, are common in Ceylon.

THE citizens of Kentucky have passed a law that actions for breach of promise to marry shall be tried before a jury of women.

A NEW method of preventing the escape of smoke from furnaces has been devised by a Glasgow inventor. A door of peculiar construction causes the smoke to whirl in eddies until it is consumed.

A LATE addition to the wheelwoman's wardrobe is the bicycle waterproof, to be worn while riding. It is a short cape, suitably cut for the purpose for which it is intended, and when adjusted falls protectingly over the handle bar.

THE mountains of the moon are immensely larger in proportion than those of the earth. The moon is but 1.49th the size of the earth, but its mountain peaks are nearly as high. Twenty-two are higher than Mont Blanc, which is within a few feet of three miles high. The highest is little more than four miles and a half.

AMSTERDAM has been negotiating for the acquisition of the gas, water, telephone, and tramway companies. The shareholders of the water company have been practically forced to sell their property to the municipality at a sacrifice of more than two-thirds of the share capital. The experiment of municipalising all such public undertakings seems likely to be carried out thoroughly.

A PORTABLE crematory for military purposes has been invented by a Polish engineer. It has the appearance of the army baking-oven, but is much higher and heavier, and is drawn by eight horses. It is intended for the disposal of the bodies of soldiers killed in battle, so as to avoid the danger of epidemics from the burial of great numbers of men. Each German army corps, it is said, will be equipped with one.

NOW that they are becoming used to it the men and women of Japan are admirers of the pervasive wheel. The Government has equipped many of its postmen with roadsters, especially those who deliver mails in the suburbs or in the country districts. In each brigade a bicycle corps has been formed, who are daily drilled in about the same style as similar organizations in the armies of Europe. The Japanese people themselves still regard the wheel as a great curiosity, but are beginning to both master it and manufacture it.

AMONG the newest inventions is a wagon called a hunting trap. The motive power of this is a single-cylinder motor of a modified Bens build, making 350 to 400 revolutions, and of about four-horse power. The engine weighs 300 pounds. There is neither carburetor nor water tank, a condenser being used instead, requiring thirty pounds of water for a run of eight or ten hours. A friction clutch controls the speed, and the wagon may be reversed by shifting a bolt without touching the engine. There are brakes for use when sudden stops are to be made or on inclines. There is but little noise from the exhaust, as it is stilled by a muffler, which also prevents any disagreeable odour by condensing unburned gases.

A MORE disagreeable object than a scorpion of Ceylon it would be difficult to imagine. Although, as a rule, it does not measure more than seven inches in length, there is a species found in the woods that are longer than a foot. They crawl out of some dried wood, and taking up their position on a convenient rock or stone, looking, as they hold their great jointed sting curved over their backs and their claws held aloft, the very picture of aggressive warfare. Here they stretch themselves in the broiling sun and await their prey. These are the small, beautiful honey-birds that dart from flower to flower, and take the place of the humming birds of the East. As one approaches the scorpion seems to shrink into the stone until it becomes almost imperceptible. Suddenly the great insect will raise its claws and dart them at its beautiful victim, which in a moment is destroyed.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

DR.—See answer to Troubled Edith.
CABRIANCA.—We are unable to inform you.
S. T.—Solomon's Temple was begun 1004 B.C.
VOYAGER.—You must provide your own outfit.
EAGER.—Such recommendations are never given.
W. A. M.—You must inject carbolic with a syringe.
ILL-HEALTH.—A medical certificate should be obtained.

TWENTY.—A quarter's notice is all that can be expected.

YUN-YUN.—A teaspoonful of ammonia to one teaspoonful of water.

L. T.—Silver is not a legal tender in England for over 25.

DOUBTFUL.—The final "s" in "Hudibras" is sounded.

TROUBLED MOTHER.—Any of the large metropolitan hospitals.

J. W.—Jonathan Wild was executed at Tyburn, on the 24th of May, 1725.

CANTOR.—It is pronounced in three syllables, with the accent on the first.

MY SWEETHEART.—The lady should take the arm of the gentleman, not his leg.

FAIR ROSEBUD.—All dyes are injurious to the hair if used for any length of time.

LITTLE HENRY.—You must apply to some of the ship-owners who take apprentices.

ONE IN DIFFICULTIES.—It is not a matter in which we can advise; consult a solicitor.

MRS.—Bananas are sometimes cured by applying iodine freely twice a day with a feather.

WORKER.—If they come upon the parish he may be called upon to contribute to their support.

J. M.—If the vendor refuses to take it back you can sue him for the return of the money paid.

GO-A-HEAD.—The art of writing in characters, or shorthand, was well known to the ancient Greeks.

STEP DADGOTTER.—A step-mother has no claim to the custody of step-children after the death of the father.

CONSTANT READER.—A little carbolic acid in the water when you scrub the boards, bedsteads, &c., should help you.

CLERK.—Your writing is good, but scarcely comes up to the standard of what is expected from a regular clerk.

S. R. T.—Soften the paint first by application of olive oil or butter; when soft apply either turpentine or benzine.

LOVER OF ANIMALS.—The Zoological Gardens belong to a society of proprietors, and are supported by subscription fees.

BERT.—Give it a drop or two of castor oil and put a little cinnamon in its drinking water. Change its food occasionally.

SUNBURN.—A liberal use of cold cream and keeping out of the sun will soon restore a complexion burned by sun and wind.

DONK.—With a soft brush and soap and water thoroughly cleanse and set in the sun to dry and bleach; repeat operation if necessary.

WORKING HOUSEKEEPER.—If you choose to mix a little honey with the turpentine it will make the trap all the more attractive to the flies.

TRUNK.—The skin will be toughened if you wash your hands regularly with carbolic soap, or with a few drops of carbolic acid in the water.

POULTR.—Shift the piano if it is in a damp place, take out and fire dry the "action," and go over all wood with a flannel dipped in turpentine.

ANXIOUS INQUIRER.—As a definite answer to this question, it may be said that it depends very much upon the person whether or not it is injurious.

BERTIE.—Due notice having been given according to law, the coat would be nine shillings and sevenpence. We must refer you to the London Directory for the address.

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT.—If you are thoroughly proficient in the style you have learnt you need not take up another; test yourself with some rapid public speaker.

JONNY.—Governesses in such families seldom if ever dine with the heads of the establishment; they take their meals alone, or with the younger branches of the establishment.

D. L.—The duties and rights of partners are regulated by their contracts, and where it is silent by the law of partnership, and as to any particular matter you should consult a lawyer.

FACULTY.—Wash your face at night with buttermilk, let it dry on, and wash off in the morning; the application may have to be several times renewed; or another simple plan is to pass a newly cut lemon over the face, or to wet the face with the squeezed out juice of lemon.

VIRGIL.—The title of emperor is of such exalted dignity as to outrank that of royalty. An emperor is the supreme head of countries some or all of which are governed by kings.

JONATHAN.—Arkansas is pronounced Arkansaw. This is the official pronunciation. The early French settlers on the Red River pronounced the word as though spelled Arkansaw.

A CONSTANT SUBSCRIBER.—We are very sorry we cannot supply the information asked for, as it is against our rules to publish the names and addresses of any firms in this way.

REX.—It is made with five pailfuls of soft soap, two pounds of salt, and one pound of resin. Simmer together, and when thoroughly fused turn out in shallow pans, so as to be easily cut.

COMING STAR.—We do not advise anyone to go upon the stage. It may be that you possess the requisite gifts to achieve success; but you will find the life of an actress a hard one under any circumstances.

HISTORICUS.—The oldest provincial governing body in the world is at Douglas, in the Isle of Man, known as the Court of Tynwald and House of Keys. It is supposed to have been in existence for 1,100 years.

B. S. F.—The Queen has never witnessed a session of the House of Commons. She is denied this privilege because of the old constitutional belief that the presence of the sovereign would be a violation of the freedom and secrecy of the debates.

M. O. G.—Almond milk is a delicious drink. Blanch and pound six dozen almonds, mix with two table-spoonfuls of loaf sugar and one pint of boiling water, mix well and add gradually a quart of water, strain, let cool, and serve in glasses with shaved ice.

THE DEATH MESSAGE.

"She died this morning." From the bright May sky
 Fell this black thunderbolt across the wire,
 And careless hands gave into mine the scroll
 Which told that nevermore could day be fair
 And never should be mine my heart's desire.

How spent those hours I cannot now recall.
 There is a memory of a quiet street
 Where leaves hung green. A striving to conceive
 How life could still go on. Ills were averted
 (I loathe them since). The rest is incomplete.

Have others memories like this in their hearts,
 And can they live them down? If ours there be
 For losses like my own, oh, may I find
 Far would I journey for the remedy.
 Selfish? Yes—but what knows she now of earth—
 or me?

"She died this morning." Burned within my soul
 The words return again with pain of fire.
 Was it so long ago? Have years swept by
 Since death came to me down the cruel wire
 And all life's best died with the heart's desire?

MILES.—There is no channel through which you could obtain publication for your songs after they have been set to music for you except you choose to arrange for it with a regular music publisher, who will insist on whole cost being paid by you; publication of songs with music does not pay.

YOUNG MAN.—The only thing that can be done to clothe to preserve it is to apply an occasional coat of copal varnish to the surface with an ordinary paint brush; let that dry hard, and it forms a shelly skin upon the face of the cloth that lasts for a considerable time.

TROUBLED EDITH.—You may get rid of them temporarily at any time by holding your face over a bowl of boiling water for a few minutes, then rubbing vigorously with a coarse towel, and next applying spirits to the face to close the pores; what the worms indicate is that your digestion is not in very good order.

HENRIETTA.—It is not dangerous for you to train in weightlifting as long as you take care never to do more than you can accomplish easily; the moment you feel your strength is taxed and a big effort necessary, stop; there is danger of an accident then that may ruin your constitution.

W. O.—Two drachms chloride of ammonia in a pint of rose water, and ten drops otto of roses in an ounce of spirits of wine; mix the two solutions and add an ounce of powdered venetian sale; materials from a chemist; apply to the face with a sponge after washing in the morning.

SUFFERER.—Deafness proceeds from so many causes that none but a physician can tell you whether or not any particular case is curable. It is said that sometimes it is caused by hard secretions of wax in the ear, the removal of which leaves the hearing as perfect as before. This may be your case. Consult some good specialist in that line about it.

MINDER.—Put into a saucupan a thimbleful of camphorated alcohol, and dipping the ends of the middle fingers into the liquid, rub the inflamed surface, especially the middle portion, repeating the operation eight or ten times. Continue the rubbing at each time for about half a minute. Then allow the surface to dry, placing a tight coating of camphorated olive oil over the affected part. The application should be made at morning, noon, and night.

G. M.—Yours is, of course, a building lease, in which case, unless it is stipulated, you could not recover anything. Maybe the landlord would consider the question if you approached him in the matter; but we do not think you can force him to refund the amount you may have to spend.

LAUNDRY MAID.—You must make your starch good from a good recipe, and then iron your shirt well with a good hot iron; then take a darning and put on it a few drops of turpentine, only three or four drops; rub the shirt lightly with this; apply a hot polishing iron, and it will be quite glossy.

IN AN AWKWARD POSITION.—If you receive presents you must acknowledge them and thank the donors. If not acceptable you are at liberty to return them, and you may do so without giving offence, on the ground that you do not like to be under obligations to persons in whom you are not particularly interested.

POZZED.—The first syllable of the words "archbishop" and "archangel" is pronounced differently in the two words, because in the first the "arch" goes before a consonant, and in the other before a vowel. The rule is: Arch before a vowel is pronounced arch; before a consonant, arch.

FADED BEAUTY.—An excellent paste for refining the complexion is composed of three ounces of ground barley, one ounce of honey and the white of an egg. This is to be spread at night on the cheeks, nose and forehead, and washed off in the morning with tepid water.

ONE IN DUBIA.—We do not think you are to blame. It is a very difficult matter to awaken thought in a dull mind; it requires much more genius to teach a dull and stupid boy or girl than to produce a prodigy in the shape of a pupil who can do wonderful things at an extraordinary youthful age.

TATT.—Pease porridge should be boiled like ordinary porridge; stir in a bit of butter; it improves the dish; then, for the bronchitis let a raw egg be beaten for froth in a bowl and a cupful of hot tea (not boiling) milk poured over, pinch of sugar added, and the whole taken as quickly as possible before laying down and rising up next morning.

DART.—For soda cream, dissolve one pound of kaf sugar in a pint of water, add the juice and grated rind of a large lemon; set over the fire to boil. Add the beaten whites of three eggs, stir take from the fire and strain. Let cool and bottle. When ready to use put two table-spoonfuls in a glass of iced water and add a pinch of soda.

UNCIVILIZED.—You can be very deliberate, and consume a portion of the time in sipping a glass of water, or in spreading your napkin upon your knees, or in conversation with those next to you, and so manage to lose what the waiter is at the table at which you are sitting, and then you can confirm to it without embarrassment.

MYRK.—Out thin two pounds of yellow soap into a double saucepan, occasionally stirring it until it is melted, which will be in a few minutes if the water is kept boiling hot; then add half a pound of palm oil, a quarter of a pound of honey, and five pennyworth of true oil of cinnamon. Let all boil together for about eight minutes; then pour out and stand it till next day. It is then fit for immediate use.

REAL JAM.—In the case of strawberries and most other preserves made of soft fruit it is best to melt the sugar first. To do that several ways may be adopted. One is to put a pot of jelly, say red currant or the juice of either currants or even gooseberries, into a pan with the sugar to melt it. Then let it boil, perhaps for five minutes, and add the strawberries, and boil the proper time. Another way of melting the sugar is to put some of the preserves themselves in with the sugar, not very many, but as many as will make liquid enough to melt it, and proceed in the same way.

NANCY LEE.—There does not seem to be anything for your niece to do except to wait the unfolding of events. An inexperienced young man sometimes gets into such a state of semi-lunacy as to come home upon your nephew, but it usually passes off after a while and leaves its victim in a very prudent mood. The rich and beautiful young lady who has so bewitched him may be a coquette, who is merely flitting with him because she has nothing else to do just now. If that is so, he will soon find out the truth, and be glad to take refuge from his mortification in the faithful love of your niece. If indeed she should be able to receive back such a weak and unworthy lover and again confide in him.

THE LONDON READER can be sent to any part of the world, post free, Three-shilling Weekly; or Quarterly, One Shilling and Eightpence.

ALL BACK NUMBERS, PARTS and VOLUMES are in print, and may be had of all Booksellers.

NOTICE.—Part 422 Now Ready, price Sixpence, post-free, Eightpence. Also Vol. LXVI., bound in cloth, 4s. 6d.

THE INDEX to Vol. LXVI. is Now Ready; Price One Penny, post-free, Three-halfpence.

ALL LETTERS TO BE ADDRESSED TO THE EDITOR OF THE LONDON READER, 34, Strand, W.C.

†† We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.



How shall we save life?

and how shall we prevent infectious disease entering the Home?

By the use of **LIFEBUOY SOAP**.

Where there are dirty boards and sinks, musty cupboards and foul smells, there disease is surely germinating, and will thrive. This deadly work can be stopped with one bar of

LIFEBUOY ROYAL DISINFECTANT SOAP.

It will not only remove the seeds of sickness which thrive in dirt, but it will destroy them.

Here, then, we have the means of preventing and destroying infection. It needs only that we put out our hands and use it.

Borwick's THE BEST THAT MONEY CAN BUY.
Baking
Powder
5 GOLD MEDALS
800,000 PACKAGES SOLD WEEKLY.



HAS NO
EQUAL
FOR
Beetham's
Glycerine
Cucumber.

KEEPING THE SKIN SOFT AND SMOOTH
AT ALL SEASONS.

It Removes and prevents all

REDNESS, TAN, ROUGHNESS, IRRITATION, CHAPS,
ETC., AND

A CLEAR AND HEALTHY COMPLEXION IS ENSURED BY ITS USE.

BEWARE OF INJURIOUS IMITATIONS!

Be sure to ask for "BEETHAM'S," the ONLY GENUINE.

In Bottles 1s. & 2s. 6d., of all Chemists and Perfumers.

M. BEETHAM & SON, Chemists, Cheltenham.

PEPPER'S TONIC

Promotes Appetite.
CURES DYSPEPSIA, HYSTERIA, NERVOUS COMPLAINTS.
SHILLING BOTTLES.

SULPHOLINE SHILLING BOTTLES.
A SPOTLESS SKIN.
A BEAUTIFUL COMPLEXION.
ERUPTIONS, PIMPLES
ENTIRELY FADE AWAY.
LOTION

"A Sovereign Remedy"

FOR
CHAFED SKIN, PILES, INSECT BITES, STINGS, CHAPPED
HANDS, SCALDS, CUTS, SORE EYES, SUNBURN, EARACHE,
NEURALGIC AND RHEUMATIC PAINS, THROAT COLDS,
RINGWORM, AND SKIN AILMENTS GENERALLY, is



Large Pots, 1s. 1½d. each, at Chemists, &c., or Post Free
for value.

F. C. CALVERT & Co., Manchester.

Awarded 75 Medals and Diplomas.